RUBENS

RUBENS AND ISABELLA BRANDT

Old Pinakothek, Munich (1609-1610)

RUBENS

BY

LOUIS HOURTICQ
Inspector of Fine Arts of the City of Paris

Translated by FREDERICK STREET

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RUBENS

PART FIRST

(1577–1609)

RUBENS

CHAPTER I

BIRTH OF RUBENS

At the time when Rubens was born the Duke of Alva had already had his Spanish bands in Flanders for more than ten years. The badly paid soldiers were a heavy burden on the peaceful life of the country and the prosperous civilisation of the cities, for at the least resistance or provocation horrible massacres took place of peasants or of city folk. The scythe cut without resistance through the thick grass. At last the turn of Antwerp came. All the treasures of the Indies were hidden behind its walls. The Spanish veterans grew impatient and on the fourth of November, 1576, in full daylight, they raged through the town crying, "Sant Iago! Sant Iago! España! España! á sángre! á carne! á fuego! á saca!" After them poured a mob of villagers and camp followers with bundles of straw

and torches. The garrison of mercenaries fled and the townspeople were slaughtered while trying bravely to defend their homes. In the Place de Meir they held out for a long time, but it was easy for the long Spanish rapiers to pierce unarmed bodies. The pavement of the Bourse ran with blood and corpses were piled in heaps. At the Grand Place the assailants hesitated for a moment. The houses were protected like forts and from every window arquebuses fired on them. Then that whole quarter and the Hôtel de Ville began to catch on fire. There was no choice but to flee or to be burnt alive and the fugitives, carried along in the general panic, were driven into the Scheldt by the Spanish cavalry. In all six to eight thousand people were slaughtered, burnt to death or drowned. Then came the time to extract all treasures from their hiding places. For fifteen days the most methodical, ingenious cruelty was exercised to extort from the people their money, plate and precious stuffs. "Women were hung up entirely naked with stones of great weight tied to their feet; men stretched out and bound to the floor suffered the most shameful and cruel tortures that brutality could conceive" (De Thou). A young girl, torn from her parents and her betrothed, was stripped of her clothes, beaten till the blood came and then

driven through the streets before she was killed; a woman, discovered in her cellar, was tortured, hung, cut down before she was dead, tortured again, hung a second time, and then a third. The corpses rotted in the streets. Five thousand adventurers had turned a sumptuous city of more than a hundred thousand inhabitants into a smoking and pestiferous charnel house.

The awakening was terrible for these merchants and peaceful citizens, lulled into security by well-being. They were suddenly forced into familiarity with horrible fear, dread of massacre, pillage and ruin, and in this people, plunged against their will into a life and death struggle, fierce feeling was temporarily aroused and the peaceful equilibrium of moral qualities was destroyed. It was the sons of the men who suffered this anguish and disaster who applauded Rubens and his school. They found their own emotions in an art where robust and tranquil health was rent by sudden passion and brutality; they recognised the athletic executioners, the shrieking martyrs, and the suffering, fainting saints.

A few months after the "Spanish Fury" in Antwerp, Rubens was born on June 28, 1517, at Siegen, a little Westphalian town. His family were middle-class people from Antwerp—the descendants of tan-

ners, druggists and apothecaries, and also a few notaries and lawyers. His father, Jean Rubens, was a graduate of the Universities of Louvain, Padua and Rome, doctor *in utroque jure*, and had married the daughter of a prosperous merchant—Maria Pypelinckx. He had held from 1561 the dignity of Alderman of Antwerp, until the political storms overwhelmed his existence. To save his life, like many of his fellow-citizens suspected of Calvinism, Jean Rubens fled on the arrival of the Duke of Alva from Antwerp to Cologne. His misdemeanours there prevented a long stay, for he became the lover of Anne of Saxony, the wife of William of Nassau, who was at that moment leading the Low Countries against the Spaniard. The lovers were denounced. Jean was arrested, imprisoned, and threatened with death. He was saved by his wife. For two years Maria Pypelinckx struggled heroically and ably and succeeded in gaining the life and partial liberty of her husband. Under bond of good behaviour he could live at Siegen. The home was restored and it was during this period, between 1573 and 1578, that Peter Paul Rubens was born. Philip's birth was three years earlier. Later the Rubens family was allowed to return to Cologne where the father could utilire his connections as a jurist. At heavy cost he secured a complete liberation, but died very

soon afterwards. Nothing now kept Maria Pypelinckx away from her own country. In June, 1589, she returned to Antwerp. Peter Paul was then ten years old. No one cared to remember those three years at Siegen; the reason for going there was better kept secret, so the mother of the painter let it be believed that she had never left Cologne during her absence from Antwerp. Her son believed it and, until the seventeenth century, all the biographies of Peter Paul repeat the legend of his birth in Cologne.

Settled once more in Antwerp, the widow of Jean Rubens was able to recover some of her property. She lived in the Rue du Couvent, near the Scheldt, and sent her two children to the school of Romboul Verdonc by the Cathedral. There they met young Moretus who was to inherit the great Plantin printing house, and who always remained their friend. It was here that Peter Paul, who already knew a little German and French, learnt Latin. As for drawing, he practised it as a child will, amusing himself by copying the illustrations of Tobias Stimmer's Bible. While his brother Philip began a brilliant career, thanks to his knowledge of the law, Peter Paul was placed as page in the service of a great lady, the Countess de Lalaing, widow of the Governor of Antwerp. The boy was soon bored

with this gay, inactive life and begged to be taught to paint. This art was always, to quote Guicharden, "an important thing, useful and honourable," and particularly so at Antwerp. Peter Paul was sent to the landscape painter, Tobias Verhaecht, a distant connection of the Rubens family. The boy was then in his fourteenth year.

It was not the glorious masterpieces of Ghent and Bruges which were given him as models. In 1600 the old schools had almost disappeared, deserted for the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke. Here a composite art flourished. Flemish in origin and Italian in education, the inheritance from Quentin Matsys and the teaching of Raphael mingled in varying proportions and with unequal success.

CHAPTER II

FLEMISH PAINTING AT ANTWERP AND RUBENS' TEACHERS

FLEMISH art grew out of a perfection of technique. Karl van Mander, after attributing the discovery of oil painting to Herbert van Eyck, adds: "Our art lacked nothing but this noble practice to match nature or represent it." This is the definition of Flemish painting. It began at this time, and had as its main object to represent nature. Did it invent or merely perfect its instrument? That no one knows, but the Flemings certainly possessed a tool of unique power and precision, and to understand perfectly all the resources of this medium was the highest ambition of every painter of the school. If their art is religious, it is the religion of a good craftsman, of honest and incredibly conscientious work. The apprentissage was entirely for dexterity, and to sincerely copy a model was the great secret of the trade. "Joachim Buecklaer found much difficulty in painting and colouring well, until the day

when his Uncle Peter taught him to copy everything from nature; fruits, vegetables, meat, game, fish, etc., and this system of study gave him such a degree of skill that he became one of the best painters of his time, working as if without effort, and attaining remarkable control of execution."[1] This was the education of all Flemings. The knowledge acquired by each artist did not die with him, but was handed down as a family or atelier tradition, and in this way the Dutch and Flemish schools had a long preparation for the miracles of execution which they produced later.

It is a curious history for a school of art. Read Karl van Mander: to every name is attached the reputation of some special form of dexterity. One man has learnt to treat foliage in a charming manner. Pourbus painted the earthly Paradise in such a way that the apple trees could be distinguished from the pears and walnuts. What was particularly noteworthy in Hans Bol's picture of the Adventure of Icarus? "A cliff rising out of the sea, crowned by a castle, painted in such a manner that nothing better could be desired, the rock is so charmingly garnished with moss and plants of many colours." Steinwyck, before Peter Neefs, painted only the in-

[1] Karl van Mander—*Le Livre des Peintres.*

teriors of modern churches, another only kitchens, another understood to perfection how to paint a drummer in a guard-house, and another was a specialist in night effects. Many of them painted portraits which were animated and excellent likenesses, "getting shadows even in the carnations," and able to make life glow in "the tanned faces of the boatmen." Technical skill became common. I will not dwell on the prowess of a Kelet, who, having abandoned brushes, painted with his fingers and later with his toes, producing, according to his friend van Mander, admirable pictures. These artists were not all of wide scope; their imagination was often primitive, but there was not a bungler among them.

At the period when young Rubens began to paint the Flemish school had not belied its origin. It had given what it had promised; it had proved that oil painting was the "best method of reproducing nature in all its aspects."

But during the last century something more than the Flemish spirit had inspired the Antwerp school. The fame of the great Italians had reached Flanders, and these good workmen were wonderstruck before the majesty of Florence and Rome. This art of the South had for them a European glory, and an irresistible prestige in that it called itself the voice of antiquity. These excellent colourists,

who until now had limited their ambition even in historical pictures to the representation of scenes from their own times, now tried to detach themselves from this realism to which they were held by both habit and taste and to create imposing fictions. The masterpieces of Italy were spread out for cutting, and Cocxie was not at all pleased when Jerome published a print of the School of Athens by Raphael. He was afraid of the evidences of his larceny. But any scruples soon disappeared, and they began to make a merit of their thefts.

"The painters who have stayed long abroad—especially in Italy—bring back to us a style which greatly surpasses in beauty and elegance the old Netherland manner." They at least come back with portfolios full of copies and drawings, and thereafter the figures of Raphael and Michelangelo peopled their pictures.

Of course this adaptation was not done without some awkwardness. In the hands of these painters of peasants and bourgeois, the athletes of Michelangelo and the splendidly draped figures of Raphael degenerated somewhat, and, what was much more serious, the vivid, limpid colouring of the Flemish palette weakened and grew thick. With truth in costume, utility and beauty of colour also passed. No more Gothic headdresses and caps, no more

pointed shoes, no more collars of fine lace or robes of velvet and ermine. Jewels no longer shimmered on the rich stuffs of Flanders. Pale colours and heavy opaque shadows model the muscles and togas. There were undoubtedly some artists who loyally preserved their Flemish inheritance against the foreign invasion. Dynasties of painters like the Breughels still delight the eye with peasant scenes and frolics, quite ignorant of classic proportion, but past masters in refinement of colour and decision of touch. Nevertheless, at the end of the sixteenth century there was not a painter's apprentice in Antwerp who did not dream of leaving it. They were drawn to Italy by the tales of those who returned and were eager to see the marvels which filled their imagination. Van Mander speaks of "Rome, that famous and seductive city, so ornamented with works of art that it seems created for painters." In despair at not being able to satisfy this desire Henri Goltzius fell into a black melancholy, and finally went into a decline and spat blood for at least three years. His condition became so serious that he was forced, ill or not, to start South. At each stage his health improved. This was in 1590, the year that Rubens entered the studio of Tobias Verhaecht.

The three masters under whose hands he passed were all pupils of Italy. The first, Tobias Verhaecht,

is little known. We are told that he was esteemed as a landscape painter, and, to judge by the few pictures certainly his, he painted the hills and vales and ruins of Italy rather than the green fields and wide horizons of Flanders. Rubens stayed only a short time with this master, but worked four years in the atelier of van Noort and four in that of Otho Venius.

Van Noort is said, by tradition, to have represented the naturalism, frank and full of colour, of the Flemish school and Venius the learned correctness of Italy. The same desire for antithesis has classed van Noort as a man of violent and difficult temper, in contrast to the suave and courteous Venius. Nothing really proves that van Noort was brutal and drunken. His pupils were many and stayed with him long. What little remains of his work shows a Romanist who admired and imitated Veronese, with nothing of Breughel. One canvas, it is true, in the Church of St. Jacques at Antwerp, has superb vigour. It is a group of fishermen in the midst of whom St. Peter stands, holding up a huge fish. But if this painting is by the master of Rubens it proves too much, for it was many years before Rubens painted with such force. It would be necessary to suppose that he had abandoned this strong realism to return to it again later. It is more rea-

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Nancy Museum (1604–1606)

sonable to take this picture from van Noort than to believe, with M. Max Rooses, in the influence of a pupil, become master in his turn, on his old instructor, a theory that is possible, because van Noort died after Rubens, but hardly probable, as it would make a page unique of its kind in the work which the author has left us.

Otho van Veen, who called himself Otho Venius, is much better known. Many of his pictures are in the museums and churches of Belgium; his biography is not obscure nor his personality undefined. Rubens must have desired his lessons because he was at that time the most famous painter in the Low Countries. He was a man of cultivated mind and finished manners whose fortune was due partly to the favour of the Archdukes. At Antwerp he had been Dean of the Guild of St. Luke and of the Society of the Romanists. He had decorated the city for the reception of the Archduke Ernst in 1594. In 1599 he again put triumphal arches over the pathway of the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabella. Alexander Farnese had attached him to his person as military engineer. Later he was "court painter" before Rubens. This brilliant career seems to announce the even more brilliant one of his pupil, and the works of Venius lead up to those of Rubens.

Venius is the type of a man who has lost much of his own personality by assimilating too well a culture that was foreign to his natural talent. His painting recalls that of Florence and Rome, and is individual only in its vividness of colour and soft roundness of drawing. Rubens learnt from him to garnish his compositions, to fill his canvas with well-placed figures gracefully draped and finely posed, and thus prepared himself to appreciate Raphael. Venius at the same time taught his pupil his gay, soft colour, always warm, except in those deplorable blues.

When Rubens left this atelier he was no longer a student. He was able to sell his pictures. Some of them he kept. "The other paintings which are beautiful," says the will of Maria Pypelinckx, "belong to Peter Paul who painted them." These pictures are not known. His nephew Philip writes to de Piles that they were like those of Otho Venius. That seems probable, if we remember that ten years later, after his return from Italy, Rubens seems to have taken up again for a while the palette of Venius and his rather stiff style and too fresh colouring with, it is true, greater transparency and variety in the play of tones.

Peter Paul had been for two years admitted as a master of the Guild of St. Luke. He could after that

work at Antwerp in his own atelier, and his success determined him to remain there. He was already as celebrated as Venius, if we are to believe his nephew Philip. But the education of an artist in those days was not complete without a journey to Rome and to Venice. Up till now his masters had merely shown him the reflection of the masterpieces of Italy. His longing to see them in their own country was irresistible.

CHAPTER III

RUBENS IN ITALY

On May 8, 1600, Rubens received his passport. Two days later he was on horseback on his way to Venice. There he admired and studied Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, and met a gentleman in the suite of the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo di Gonzaga, who was passing through the town. The duke had the painter brought to him, valued his skill as a copyist, and took him into his service, where Rubens was to remain for eight years, the duration of his stay in Italy. Very soon they left Venice and, after a short trip to Florence, where Rubens was present at the marriage of Marie de Médicis, the sister-in-law of his patron, they returned to Mantua.

The little ducal court maintained a tradition of long standing of luxury and elegance. The Palace of Mantua, which represented the tastes of successive dukes and the most successful styles of the Renaissance, contained the best of Mantegna's works. In the Palace of Té was displayed the

Mad War of the Giants of Guilio Romano. The gallery of paintings and statuary was famous throughout Europe, and the duke was no less proud of his stable and the lions and tigers and crocodiles of his menagerie. The life of the Court was passed in continual fêtes, spectacles, banquets and hunting. Vincenzo di Gonzaga, gallant cavalier of thirty-one, of a fiery temperament and fickle nature, counted a taste for the arts among his other passions. He maintained a troupe of actors and famous musicians, and sought for learned men and poets. Painters had their own place in this cultivated atmosphere. Franz Pourbus and Rubens were ordered to copy those masterpieces which could not be bought. They were also obliged to paint the portraits of the most beautiful women, "queens or favourites," a collection especially dear to the Duke Vincenzo.

Rubens had, nevertheless, a chance for some original work. While he was at Rome working for his master and studying for himself, he received from a Spanish prince, Duke Albert, an order for an important picture. Just as he was leaving for Brussels, where he was to undertake the government of the Low Countries, the prince remembered that he was a cardinal and that his titular church was Santa-Croce-in-Jerusalem at Rome, and he ordered three paintings from the Flemish master for its

altar. These paintings are still in existence, but in very bad condition, stranded at the municipal asylum of Grasse after many adventures. They are the first works of Rubens of which we can be absolutely certain. They consist of a *St. Helena*, a young woman richly dressed under a portico with twisted columns in the midst of a flight of angels; an *Ecce Homo* which owes a great deal to Titian's *Christ Crowned With Thorns;* an *Elevation of the Cross*, inspired by Tintoretto—a huge, oblique cross swaying with the effort of the executioners. This is a composition to which he returned later on. They are heavy, awkward paintings, brutal and uncertain in composition, but already they show realistic poses and violent gestures. The beginning is mediocre, but still that of Rubens.

After that he left Italy for a year. The Duke of Mantua, whose estate was bordered by the Spanish possessions, had everything to fear from such neighbours. His peace could only be guaranteed by the friendship of the new King Philip III. and of the Duke of Lerma, his favourite, and of the friends of the favourite. He sent, thereupon, an embassy to the Court of Madrid with rich presents: a carriage, horses, arms and pictures, both copies and originals. Such a mission demanded in the ambassador intelligence, energy, a fine presence and a culti-

vated mind. Rubens was made for the position. He left on March, 1603, and if we are to judge by his correspondence the journey was not without difficulty. It began by taking the wrong route, was followed by delay in the progress, increasing expenses and trouble with the customs officers. Rubens was afraid that his travelling allowance would be insufficient, and replied with dignity to the criticism which he left behind him. The party went very slowly and at last embarked at Livorno, and after eighteen days spent in the crossing disembarked at Alicante. Again disappointments. The Court had left Madrid for Valladolid. It was necessary to start again for twenty days of travel and twenty days of rain. The roads were broken up, and the heavy baggage had to be left behind. When it had all been gotten together again new disaster was discovered. His paintings were partly rotted. Luckily the king was not there, and before his return everything was put in order.

Rubens was resourceful. He retouched the injured paintings and replaced those hurt beyond repair by two pictures which he himself improvised —*Democritus* and *Heraclitus*. Everything turned out well. The king was delighted and the Duke of Lerma in ecstasy before the copies, which he took for originals. Rubens himself, much congratulated,

would have been satisfied if the accredited ambassador of the Duke of Mantua had not been rather lacking in courtesy to the painter, ambassador by chance. The favour of the Duke of Lerma recompensed Rubens. For the minister duke he painted a great portrait, "admirably successful" but now lost, and a series of Apostles, soft in treatment and characterless, at present in the Prado. Nevertheless he was anxious to return to Italy to continue his studies. At Valladolid there was nothing. All the good paintings which Spain possessed were at Madrid, and the Spanish painters inspired him only with contempt. After having eluded the difficulties of another commission, the duke wished to send him to the French Court for his famous gallery of "beauties." Rubens at last returned to Mantua after an absence of a year.

Gonzaga, well satisfied with his painter, renewed his pension of four hundred ducats a year payable every three months, and gave him the work of decorating the tomb of his mother in the Church of the Trinity at Mantua. Rubens painted for this three large pictures. In one he represented the duke and his father at one side; on the other side his wife and his mother kneeling with their eyes lifted up towards the Holy Trinity. In the second he reproduced the scene of the Transfiguration in almost

the same way in which Raphael treated it. In the third the *Baptism of Jesus Christ* is half a copy of Raphael and half of Michelangelo. These paintings have been scattered and to-day the first is in Mantua, the second at Nancy and the third at Antwerp. In spite of their bad condition, we can still see Rubens in them.

Undoubtedly the originator of new compositions was not yet born. His imitation is ingenuous like that of a schoolboy, and it is not only the figures and the grouping which he borrowed, but even the brilliant and luminous colouring of Antwerp thickened and grown heavy in imitation of Baroccio and Caravaggio. Still, the portraits of the duke and the duchess show already the real Rubens. Given a good model, a Fleming—if he is skillful, is never mediocre. The Gonzaga family praying have a proud distinction, and their heads are beautiful and full of character. The idea of the composition was good, and Rubens was to use it again. One of his undisputed masterpieces, the Triptych of St. Ildefonso, gains enormously from two figures, those of the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Clara-Eugenia, kneeling with the same nobility of attitude.

After that Rubens scarcely left Rome at all and kept on copying famous paintings for the Duke of Mantua. He liked to live among the memories of

antiquity and the Renaissance, and he took part in the bitter rivalry of the schools for the public favour. That was where reputations were made and his genius began to be recognised. For the decoration of the high altar of a church of the Oratorians, the Chiesa-Nuova, the Fleming was preferred to such famous artists as Caravaggio, Baroccio, Petro de Cortona, Joseppico and Guido Reni. It was a large undertaking, a picture of at least twenty square yards, and Rubens executed it with the greatest care, though he was interrupted by the requirements of the Duke of Mantua, who obliged him to go with him to Genoa. This was the last important work done by Rubens in Italy.

It is also the most beautiful. The composition is simple, a group of saints and martyrs, a subject that was always dear to Rubens. Two of the figures are particularly striking, St. Gregory in an ample cope and a gracious and smiling St. Domitilla, wrapped in violet and yellow silk with shimmering folds. These figures already show the real Rubens vigorous and standing firmly on the ground. The architecture is enlivened by angels circling around a portrait of the Madonna. The lighting is finely handled, "the ensemble at the same time brilliant and soft, is superb in the handling" (Emil Michel). Unluckily when the canvas was put in place it was

TRIPTYCH OF ST. ILDEFONSO

Imperial Museum, Vienna (1630–1632)

half lighted and marred by reflections. It was necessary to replace the brilliant picture by a dull one on slate. Rubens began to repeat on a larger scale his original work, only modifying slightly its composition. He tried to sell the first picture to the Duke of Mantua, but without success. Various slight pretexts were found for refusing it at the very moment when the duchess was ordering Rubens to buy the work of a mediocre artist, Pomerancio. The St. Gregory followed Rubens to Antwerp, and after some retouching decorated the tomb of his mother until it was carried off by the armies of the Revolution and sent to the Musée of Grenoble.

It was now eight years since Rubens had left Antwerp, and his family were urging him to return. In 1602 his brother Philip wrote: "Take care that the term of your engagement (with the Duke of Mantua) shall not be prolonged." And he warned him against the easiness of his own disposition and the insistence of his master. The Archduke Albert had also asked the Italian prince for the return of Rubens, but only to meet with a rather sharp refusal. The painter remained willingly until he had satisfied his longing to know the art of Italy. Then only did he wish to return home. His brother, who had spent several months with him at Rome, had already gone back, recalled by the condition of their

mother's health. For a while Rubens thought that the Duke of Mantua would take him with him to the Waters of Spa. The duke went there without him, and at that very time Rubens heard that his mother's illness had grown much worse. He sprang on his horse and left, leaving behind him excuses and promises of return, but he never went back.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT RUBENS OWES TO ITALY

AFTER his long stay among the Italian masterpieces of the sixteenth century, Rubens returned to Antwerp with his memory full of sublime and beautiful forms which remained vividly with him until his last days. From his first important works painted at Mantua — his *Transfiguration* which imitated Raphael, his *Baptism of Christ* which copied Michelangelo, until the *Virgin Surrounded by Saints* on the painter's own tomb in the Church of St. Jacques, a *Santa Conversazione* in the Italian manner, and in which the great St. Jerome is a direct reminder of Correggio—the majority of his pictures, even those most intimate in their feeling and most individual in their handling, prove the persistence of his youthful impressions. Everything that was most famous in Italy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the great works whose fame was European —the *Last Judgment* of Michelangelo, the *Descent from the Cross* of Danielo de Volterra, Raphael's

Holy Families, Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin*, Domenichino's *Communion of St. Jerome*—all the themes of which a definite form had been determined by some masterpiece, all these subjects Rubens took up again and developed along the lines laid down by the great artists of Florence, Rome and Venice, as if to oppose masterpiece to masterpiece, less anxious to resemble the Italians than desirous of rivalling them.

He knew how to make his own the quality which distinguished the very great painters who expressed the genuine Flemish art as opposed to that of Italy. Northern painters are instinctively naturalistic, passionate admirers of life and careful to render it with all its characteristics. The great masters of the Italian Renaissance are above all else decorators. They only reproduce human gestures and natural objects after bringing their confusion into order and forcing them to submit to the exigencies of rhythm. The dominating idea with them is always harmony which brings unity out of diversity, gives stability even to motion and a cadence to disorder. Lines framed themselves naturally within the space to be decorated. To represent an action means to them, first of all, to fill a certain space without emptiness or crowding, rectangular, triangular or oval, and it is the space of the decoration which determines the human attitudes and movements which

fill it. In front of the great paintings of Veronese and the frescoes of Raphael, Rubens the Fleming realised the rules to which life must submit in order to create beauty, and he retained a feeling for composition that enabled him, without ever weakening the savage force of his conceptions, to enclose his fancies and impetuosities in an architecture of simple lines, perfectly balanced.

When he left Italy he knew all the secrets of those artists. There was not a painter whom he had not studied closely and copied attentively. At Mantua, in the very palace of the prince, he had filled himself with the learned, archæological art of Mantegna. With him he had entered classic times; he remembered these exact visions of the ancient world, the trophies of a triumph, the Roman eagle, the engraved breast-plate of an imperator. And, if he did not imitate the harshness of Mantegna's drawing with its metallic outlines, he was filled with admiration for his feats of perspective. He frequently used a detail which he owed to Mantegna, a corpse on its back, the feet towards the spectator and the body foreshortened. At Mantua he had also lived in the midst of the forcible paintings of Guilio Romano, and had admired the superhuman power displayed by those Titans and the pomp of his dignified processions.

At Rome he met another artist whose imagination like his own loved to produce colossuses. The influence of Michelangelo can be seen in the early works of Rubens. The *Baptism of Christ* and even the *Elevation of the Cross* show the same figures as the paintings of the Sistine, long, supple bodies with athletic arms and legs and delicate hands and feet. There are the same muscular contortions, twisted backs, stiffened bodies which in taking off a tunic go through the struggles of a wrestler, the drawing of a sculptor which recall the studies of muscles in the schools. But very soon the difference between the Fleming and the Florentine became marked. Michelangelo's giants with their huge, heavy bodies, their powerful and slow movements seem to stretch wearied limbs exhausted by their own weight, overwhelmed by sleep or by death. Those of Rubens have springy flesh moved by strong sensations. They draw themselves up or relax, trembling with pleasure, shaken by great sobs or overcome by suffering.

Raphael also taught him a great deal. Even if the great compositions of the Vatican seemed to him to confine too much the free movement of life in a symmetrical balancing of groups, he knew how to make use of the most beautiful of their suggestions: a noble old man drawn up to his full height in an

THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS
Antwerp Cathedral (1610)

attitude which expresses nothing but makes large folds in his robe and thus decorates the foreground finely; a large woman on her knees, the body thrown backwards; a young girl with a basket on her head and one arm raised, the superb attitude of a canephore which binds her body and thrusts her hips forwards, and many other figures dear to Raphael, which appear from time to time in the composition of Rubens to add the rhythm of their beautiful balance. Rubens took also from the Roman artist, we might almost say, the entire personnel of his Christian Olympus. God the Father, a venerable Saturn, without any other characteristic but his long, white beard. Christ, a Jupiter, with an elegant and vigorous torso and the Apostles with hair like shavings, and especially the group of the Holy Family with the amiable Madonna, her eyes lowered on a plump and curly-headed baby, and in the shadow of the middle distance St. Joseph, his chin in his hand, thoughtful and insignificant. Rubens simply brought these figures near to our human flesh and blood; he transformed them partly into Flemings, but it was from the necessities of his technique, not to satisfy the demands of a new poetry.

Venice especially enthralled Rubens by its magnificent and sensuous art. Titian revealed the fe-

male nude to him in its supreme beauty, the splendours of full forms, the radiancy and tenderness of warm and amber-colored flesh. Nothing could have touched him more profoundly than that poetry which Titian expressed through this healthy, inactive, physical life. Nothing ever effaced from his memory the dazzling effect of the fairylike decorations of Veronese. The brilliant nobles in free poses, glittering with jewels and shimmering brocade. The great patrician ladies robed in white satin slowly mounting majestic stairs; the elaborate architecture and delicate outline of a Corinthian capital against a green sky. The impulsive method of Tintoretto showed him how a brutal brush can add something more to the violence of a gesture and to the rapidity of a movement. All this was new to him. The Fleming saw and remembered.

Correggio finally left a lasting impression on his imagination. For in his later years at Antwerp, as his art grew more emotional, more intimate and more profound, one memory seemed to dominate it more and more, that of Correggio with his amorous painting, his soft and shadowy faces bent affectionately towards each other. He was thinking of the painter of *The Madonna of St. Jerome* when his heart softened his painter's eye and filled the atmosphere of his canvas with love and made the

caressing touch of his brush more enveloping and warmer. On the other hand, the Bologneso school seems to have played but a very small part in training his talent. Undoubtedly he made use in his own way of the eclecticism of the Carracci, but it was as an artist able to thoroughly understand the most beautiful forms of art without losing his own personality and not as a pupil searching for formulas. It was more profitable to study the great painters in their own works than in the summaries of the Bologneso school. Caravaggio interested him and held him for a moment by his vigorous contrast of light and shade, but to follow him it was necessary to make great sacrifices, darken the clearness of the day and dull the gorgeous brilliancy of colours, and to do that was to pay too dearly for force. He discarded this idea very soon, his biographers say.

The colourist in him resented the Italian influence. If he seemed to accept for a while the heavy painting of Bologna, very soon his Flemish nature freed him from it. His own art was so far from that of Bologna. The strings which he was to sound had other tones and other harmonies than the exhausted instrument of the dying Italian art. These artists of the decadence had looked too long on the pallid statues of antiquity and their painting had kept the

coldness of the marble. With such models and so impoverished a nature they could no longer be of interest except by startling through a forced effect or by arousing interest through a picture with a story. Rubens did not place the subject of the painting as more important than the colour. Even when he drew a classic bust with charcoal and a few touches of red, he softened and warmed the shining marble, deepened the eye, gave life to the expression, coloured the lips, animated the flesh and made you feel the profound living quality under the envelope. But when he paints, then, says Guido Reni, he mixes blood with the colour.

The great Italian decorators did not win him over by the even and sober radiance of the fresco. There the colour keeps the quality of the material on which it rests; it always remains plaster just as in tapestry it is silk or wool. That is the merit of fresco and also its weakness. It gives a mural representation of reality without any depth, a design with flattened reliefs; it equalises the variety of the colouring, generalises the outlines, suppresses the accidents and purifies the modelling. Oil painting cannot submit to these changes. Rubens possessed a language able to express all reality without impoverishing it. With his colour he could render the transparency of the air, the softness of flesh and the hardness of metal

and of stone. He could make the horizons distant, bring the foreground near, scatter about everywhere small and vivid details, accents of truth which suggest the thousand accents of reality and, above all, from the world of semblance he knew how to bring out a dazzling harmony of colour.

Venice even, in spite of the charm of its use of colour, gave him more to admire than to copy. The luxury of Veronese seemed to him to be of too sustained elegance. Not a single strong, fresh tint, but broken, medium colours—greens, violets and greys. The figures stand out against beautiful, clear architecture; white is used prodigally, and the even and cold light spreads out under the great porticos. This distinction was rather too studied for the Fleming. A light red or a vibrant yellow there in the midst pleased him as a brilliant phrase does in the midst of a too careful eloquence. Though he never ceased to have a passionate admiration for Titian—and always kept about him some of the works or copies of the works of the Venetian master—his painting remained always essentially different. Undoubtedly he liked his fiery, concentrated colouring, his serious and strong harmonies; but in Titian's colour there is a solidity and depth that eliminates the play of reflection, the iridescent surfaces. That solidity could be lightened, that gravity made gayer

so that while the nudes of Titian display themselves with tranquil, concentrated voluptuousness in the golden light and russet shadows of a summer afternoon, those of Rubens, young and blonde, revel with the full joy of life in the clear freshness of an eternal spring.

What the Fleming brought back from Italy was a clear idea of what he must take and what he must leave. His apprenticeship was over; it had lasted nearly twenty years. Now Rubens knew all that he could learn. He held the secrets of the two great European schools. He had not lost the feeling for colour of the Flemings; nothing could make him give up its tenderness, vigour, lightness and solidity. Italy, little by little, had initiated him into the lofty feeling of elegant and majestic decoration. His mind was enriched by the labours of many centuries and the genius of many races. It only remained to combine the sumptuous vocabulary of Antwerp with the majestic style of Venice and Rome. That union was made spontaneously by an artist whose imagination was as noble as his temperament was sensuous, and who knew how to adorn reality with all the graces of poetry, just as he gave to imaginary things the solid beauties of reality. After this masterpieces began to appear, and from that day on it is like a continuous miracle.

PART SECOND

(1609–1626)

CHAPTER I

RETURN OF RUBENS AND HIS INSTALLATION AT ANTWERP

THERE are two little pictures in the Louvre which by their contrast express the changes which transformed the existence of the bourgeois and peasants of Flanders in 1608–1609. They are very well painted according to the excellent Flemish style, where little touches of red or blue bring out clear lights in the delicate greys or the transparencies of the landscape.

One of these pictures shows a scene of pillage; a squadron of cavalry has just made a raid upon a village. The castle still burns, the men-at-arms are going into the low doors of the huts, dragging out a frightened peasant or a shrieking woman; here there is a naked corpse; there a body which is being stripped or a big man being dragged along by the hair. Piled in a hole are some wretched, pitiable clowns of Teniers, who are being shot out of hand. The horses of the soldiers are waiting for the de-

parture, and when the sinister work has been finished there will not be left behind them either a living human being or a herd of cattle. According to his custom, the Fleming with little imagination has simply painted what he saw. When towns were captured the same thing happened, only then the pillaging lasted longer.

But now the times have changed. A truce has been signed between the King of Spain and the people of the United Provinces, and it has put an end to the rule of the freebooters. This renaissance is displayed to us in a picture by Adriaan van de Venne (*Fête à l'occasion de la trêve de 1609*). The peasants, coming out of their caves, cannot believe their eyes. They help to bring muskets, helmets and breastplates, which are piled upon the ground, useless for the moment. A close group of nobles and bourgeois comes forward, peaceful, without arms, in gorgeous holiday clothes, and with genial expressions above their spotless ruffs. On the ground are laid out dishes, jugs, fruits and pastry. Wine is being cooled in the spring nearby. Everyone is about to eat well and drink well. There are jester, monkeys and musicians. They want to laugh. Two doves bill and coo, a cupid puts his foot on a rapier. They mean to enjoy all the pleasures of peace. The drawbridges of the castle are lowered, and far away in

the blue mist of the distance the clear light which brightens the landscape shows that the work in the fields has been begun again. In the midst of these bourgeois, the Spanish nobles, the Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella Clara-Eugenia, preside over the festivity. The Archduke is not handsome, a small, withered man with a strong face, enormous lower jaw, and a short, pointed beard. Isabella is thoroughly Spanish in her stiff robe, heavy headdress and her pale face, which seems cadaverous in the midst of the florid Flemings. Nevertheless seigneurs and burghers press affectionately around them. They are grateful to the foreign princes for presiding over the establishment of peace. This gratitude of the Flemish cities shows itself on every journey of the Archduke. Wherever they arrive the fronts of the houses are covered by flags and triumphal arches are raised along their route.

Rubens returned home at this expansive moment. Since the beginning of the patriotic and religious war Antwerp had suffered more than any other town. She had undergone pillage by the Calvinists and the "Spanish Fury." Besieged, taken by assault by one army, blockaded by the fleet of the other, she had suffered peculiarly on account of her situation as a frontier town between the two camps, and now, weakened in her population, her commerce

impoverished, torn and weary, her only thought was to build up again her ruins. Doubtless the wharves on the Escaut were no longer piled with all the merchandise of Europe. The streets and the Exchange, formerly so busy, seemed as if deserted; but even if her former prosperity had gone, tranquillity had returned. People could no longer grow rich, but they could enjoy life in peace. Easier days were coming to conceal the economic decline or at least to give some consolation for it. The great seaport had thus the charm of cities which have lost their activity, but preserved their luxury.

The life of the municipality began again on the old lines. The guilds were reformed. Every Sunday the burghers assembled for some religious ceremony, and sat down at a banquet of the guild. On that day there appeared resplendent banners and the flags of the guilds were paraded between the well-washed and thoroughly painted gables of the Place de Meir or the Rue des Tanneurs and while from the high belfry "thirty-three bells, both large and small, rang out in such accord and harmony and so skillfully that one would have thought them a musical instrument."

As "the trades with their symbols, the brotherhoods with their armorial bearings and banners, so the burghers with good will and devotion," majestic

and gorgeous as the Magi, paraded before the admiration of their fellow-citizens, up to the portal of Notre Dame. It is certain that many of them felt that it was good to be again at peace with life. These guilds of artisans cared for the arts above all things, and admired nothing so much as manual dexterity and the industries of luxury. The cabinetmakers, goldsmiths and painters worked for them. The merchants of Amsterdam or Haarlem, the arquebusiers, cloth merchants or rhetoricians posed themselves before the painter grouped about a council table or at a banquet, attentive and self-satisfied, with a pen or a glass in their hand, creating large pictures for Calvinists who could not have pictures in their churches. At Antwerp and Malines the guilds wanted a likeness of their patron saint, and a fine likeness of which their patron could be proud. The archers and fishmongers have their own chapel or altar which they maintain and cover with ornaments, and whose beauty expresses the piety and the prosperity of the guild.

Moreover, these unfortunate churches were in need of adornment. Many years before the iconoclasts in a moment of religious fanaticism had destroyed centuries of art. The denuded walls were as sad as those of a Protestant chapel, and the House of God could not be allowed to remain uncomfort-

able. But they did not stop at repairing the ruins, for the pacification came at the time of the Catholic renaissance. The clergy had never lost their wealth. In every parish the "priest had a large and regular revenue" (Guichardin). The religious orders were increasing in number. Franciscans, Jesuits, Carmelites, built convents and also chapels which were really huge churches. That of the Jesuits at Antwerp astonished their contemporaries by its size and splendour. The churches, monasteries and other holy places, whose number had been surprising even to travellers of the preceding century, had increased, although the population had decreased. What opportunities and what themes for great decorations! Martyrs, the miracles of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Martin, St. Roch, St. Ignatius, St. Theresa, were to occupy the work of the artist.

The new architecture demanded and showed off huge paintings far better than that of the Gothic cathedrals. In the beautiful churches of the Middle Ages the pictures of Rubens were out of place. They could only be satisfactory when framed by an altar of black or white marble à la Vignole, such as were at that time being built in large numbers in defiance of reason and good taste. Besides the Gothic cathedral had no need of pictures, and did not lend itself to them. Daylight only reached the interior cut by

the pointed arches and checkered by the windows, blotted with shadows, and divided by a forest of pillars and small columns, mysterious, changing, varying, fairylike as that which filters through to the undergrowth in a great wood. The little panels of the primitives, brilliant and strongly coloured, could stand that artificial light and be framed sympathetically in the fretted stone like the miniatures of Memling, in the amidst the carving of a reliquary. The churches which the Jesuits were building all over Catholic Europe offered the painter a greater opportunity. They had huge walls, ceilings and panel vaults—vaults which could have no other ornament but colour. Light came in through large windows, and fell evenly on the pictures so that they were lighted in almost the same way as in the atelier.

Political pacification as well as the Catholic renaissance was encouraged by the Archdukes. Their government was tolerated. They certainly had no popular sympathy, and the little Court of Brussels preserved rather too much the stiff and empty etiquette of Madrid. But they knew how to flatter the tastes of their subjects and they showed themselves to be lovers of painting, and therefore in sympathy with the glorious tradition of Flanders! They had already approached the Duke of Mantua in the hope of bringing home the Antwerp painter. Otho

Venius was the favourite painter of the Court. Rubens, as soon as he reached home, received orders and favours. They tried to keep him at Brussels but he preferred Antwerp. Nevertheless, on September 23, 1607, letters patent were signed by which he was named painter to the Court of the Archduke, "for the good report which they have had of P. P. Rubens, of his ability and experience in painting and several other arts . . . at a salary and wage of 500 pounds a year, at the rate of forty groz to the pound in Flemish money."

Thus all the influences which in the time of the Dukes of Burgundy had aided the development of the arts in Flanders appeared together again. The Court of the Dukes, the guilds and corporative parish clergy, the abbeys and convents, and finally the luxury of the middle class, these make up the influences which had caused the development of the Van Eycks and which was to help the progress of Rubens. Hardly had he arrived when the Jesuits ordered a *Visitation* from him, the Dominicans a *Discussion of the Holy Sacrament*, the Aldermen of Antwerp an *Adoration of the Magi*, and the Archduke at Brussels some portraits and a *Holy Family.*

For these reasons the painter, even if he had regretted Italy, could hardly dream of leaving his country. Besides, he was kept there by his brother

Philip, whose niece, Isabella Brandt, daughter of Jean Brandt, doctor of laws and municipal clerk, he soon married. This marriage was celebrated on October 3, 1609, in the Abbey Church of St. Michel; and the painter lived for a while in the house of his father-in-law. We can imagine what that marriage was like from the eulogies which Rubens afterwards gave of his wife: "An excellent companion whom one could or rather one must love, for she had none of the faults characteristic of her sex." Always in good humour, she was free from all feminine frailties; she was altogether kind and amiable.[1] A pleasant portrait in the Pinakothek of Munich shows us the painter and his young wife just after their marriage. "The charming face of Isabella glows with happy content, and in her eyes, with their slightly mischievous expression, there shines a certain pride in having gained the heart of the great artist who had chosen to associate her with his life. As for Rubens his face is full of serenity and full of confidence in the future, he abandons himself to the sweetness of being loved" (Emile Michel). Three children were born to him: Clara, who died while still young, Albert and Nicholas.

In May, 1610, an important order gave Rubens

[1] Letter to P. Dupuy, July 15, 1616.

the opportunity to create his first masterpiece. For the high altar of the Church of St. Walburgh at Antwerp (no longer in existence) he took up again the theme of the *Erection of the Cross* which he had already painted during his stay at Rome. The work that he did was that of a master. The Crucified One is raised slowly by the efforts of nine brutal men eager to kill, and if a moral idea has ever been expressed by physical gestures it is indeed in this work, where the vigour of the muscular force expresses cruelty while the Sufferer, with eyes and soul in heaven, abandons his captive body to the men of wrath. This picture gives an impression of unforgettable dramatic power, because it is well fitted to Rubens' peculiar gifts. By swelling muscles, stiffened bodies, clenching hands, twisting necks and outstretched legs, the movements of powerful athletes, the painter incarnated his favourite visions and at the same time was able to express hatred and fury, and by them to help the expression of his idea.

But this picture, which shows the sure skill of a master, is still the work of a pupil of the Italians. The execution is not characteristic. Pursued by the memories of Italy the painter had his imagination filled with the Titans of Guilio Romano and especially Michelangelo. Notice particularly that striking bald colossus, who by his own single effort is raising a cross

far heavier than he is. In the works of the Florentine the struggling bodies seem to be tearing invisible mountains. In Rubens' picture the body of the Crucified seems a very light weight for the display of such fierce effort. But the colouring, especially, is Italian, Roman. There are very few draperies, and these few have bizarre colours and discordant reflections. There is a great deal of the nude, rounded muscles and heavy reddish flesh with opaque shadows. The colouring is like the feeling, hard and austere; the handling is violent. In the terrible drama Rubens has placed no figure of pity, no Magdalen in tears, no fainting Virgin. The huge woman on the left panel shrieks with horror, excited by a violent grief without any tenderness. There is a certain tenseness in the picture, the need of displaying all his strong qualities and not concealing any of his skill. Later when Rubens was sure of success and thought less of impressing his art on the spectators, his work relaxed somewhat, grew freer and more personal. Then he passed from startling colour to that which is truer, from baked tones to fresh ones, from muscle to flesh, from the fierce emotion of Italy to the healthy sensuality of Flanders.

But even as it is that powerful work could not pass unnoticed. It proclaimed the superiority of Rubens over the other painters, and soon his atelier

could not hold the pupils who offered themselves. The younger men waited in the studios of other painters until he had a vacant place. He could not take any more pupils. "He could say without any exaggeration that he had had to refuse more than a hundred."[1]

It was now that he organised a regular establishment. On January, 1611, he bought in the centre of Antwerp on the Wapper in the street which to-day bears his name, "a house with a fine entrance, a court, gallery, kitchen, rooms, grounds and out-houses, such as a laundry situated nearby, which on the east side touched the wall of the Oath of the Arquebusiers, and for which he gave 7,600 florins, payable in annual instalments. He was to live there ever after. Little by little he enlarged and beautified his house according to plans which he made himself. At the end of the garden he built an Italian summer-house which appears in many of his pictures; and between the house and the garden, a colonnade in the same style adorned with busts and little columns. The interior was undoubtedly very beautiful. When Moretus enlarged his house in 1620 Woverius wrote him: "Fortunate is Antwerp to have two such citizens as Rubens and Moretus.

[1] Letter to Jacques de Bic, May 6, 1611.

Their houses will be the wonder of strangers and visited by travellers." De Piles, who is so well informed, gives this detail: "Between the court and the garden he had built a hall of a circular form like the temple of the Pantheon in Rome, and into which light entered only from above and by one opening which was in the centre of the dome. That hall was full of busts, classic statues and valuable paintings which he had brought from Italy and many other things very rare and interesting.

"Everything was placed symmetrically and in order, and for this reason many objects worthy to be in the collection, but for which there was no place, were used to ornament the other rooms in the house." In this gallery were classic busts, medals, intaglios and also modern paintings; nineteen Titians and twenty-one copies of Titian by Rubens, seventeen Tintorettos, seven Veroneses, Raphaels, German and Flemish Primitives, Romanists, small pictures by his friend, the elder Breughel and the Brouwers, painters peculiarly valued by Rubens because he found in them the Flemish feeling in its purity.

In the midst of this ostentatious luxury Rubens led a perfectly well-ordered life. The large establishment was provided for by excellent business methods. Scrupulous in filling his own contracts,

the painter allowed no delays on the other side. His life is a model of organisation and intensive production. There is never a moment of inertia or falling off in his work; never was time more filled, faculties more used, or force better directed than his. His imagination did not blur the clearness of his mind by any mirage, his vivid sensitiveness never disturbed the balance of his thoughts. His letters are those of a serene and peaceful man, and show his disregard of all frivolous things, all futile amusements and foolish books. Often a stoic phrase or an unconscious quotation from the humanists will show his long intercourse and close sympathy with the ancient philosophers. Over the portal of his garden he had cut a verse of Juvenal, the motto of a soul ruled by intelligence, safe from desire or fear, sure of its inner health, and leaving the rest in the hands of God. Rubens' work was increasing and his day long and full. He rose at four, went to mass, and worked until lunch. He ate little, "for fear that the fumes of meat would prevent him from fixing his attention," and also because he had "a great dislike for excess in food, drink or play," and after the meal worked again until four o'clock. He liked then to take a ride on horseback outside the city walls. The evening was for friends, given entirely to talking or writing or reading.

His library was large and important. The publisher, Plantin, for whom he made drawings, gave him books on natural history, botany, geography, physics, religion, philosophy, law, and he interested himself in all the science of his time. He was sent historical memoirs from France, and had treatises on architecture both classic and of the Renaissance. His mythology proves that he had read Virgil and Ovid. His love of reading was so great and the inspiration that he drew from it so useful that often while he was painting "a paid reader read aloud to him some good book, generally Plutarch or Livy or Seneca" (de Piles). He had many friends both at home and abroad; princes, great generals, savants, noble lords and rich Antwerp burghers loved and sought his companionship. Peiresc, fortunate enough to receive his letters, declares that he profited much by them, and Spinola found that in the qualities of his mind painting seemed to be the least of his gifts. He did much for painters less fortunate than himself, and his critics as well as his admirers agree that this distinguished man was also a lovable one. De Piles praises his winning manner, his pleasant humour and easy talk, his quick, penetrating mind, his way of speaking slowly and his very pleasant voice. Felibien says that he was naturally gentle and courteous, and had no greater pleasure than to

be of service to everyone. Without making any effort to please, Rubens seems to have lived surrounded by love and admiration.

"He was tall, with dignified bearing, regular features, red cheeks, chestnut hair, eyes that were brilliant with controlled fire, and a manner gentle, smiling and honest" (de Piles). All the portraits that he has left of himself have a fine and beautiful head. The large felt hat and turned-up moustaches show him the elegant cavalier that he was. The features are well defined, the direct look from well-opened eyes is without timidity or arrogance, and behind the high forehead marked with increasing baldness one feels a brain always at work, but never weary, uncertain or discouraged. He had greatly prolonged the period of study and acquisition, and the fruit came abundantly and with full flavour. He had never met indifference in others or doubt in himself; he had never searched painfully for light like a plant in the dark. At once, and with all his power, he had developed straight and fast in full brilliancy.

CHAPTER II

HIS METHODS OF WORK

HAVING set before his art an aim perfectly adapted to the means of painting, Rubens was able to build up a sure and solid technique. His process does not seem to have ever varied; he kept to the method of which he had proved the excellence. If there are differences in his work, they are not in the métier.

His aim was to catch and hold, without extinguishing it, the life in human flesh. No man was ever more drunk with the poetry of the human animal, or has expressed in a more stirring way the beauty of material life. In the distinction of his style there is always strength and physical grace. He loves to twist the body of a healthy young siren and make folds in her elastic glowing flesh. It is by the action of stretched or contracted muscles that he expressed the heroism of his warriors, and the pose is best when it shows a violent effort. It is in the torture or the relaxation of the body that

the soul shows its suffering or its joy; the spirit is here only a reflection or emanation of the extenuated, fainting flesh. Look at the Magdalen prostrated at the foot of the cross; the despair of her love is all in her streaming eyes, her head thrown back and her throat swollen with sobs. Is it possible to find in Rubens' works dull moments when his hand was careless and his eye indifferent? Certainly they exist, but never when he is painting a human being, never when his brush is charged with the paint which will become flesh. Then his art is always stirred with feeling; it is like a love-song in which each syllable thrills with devout emotion.

The method of producing this surprising result seems to be always the same. In most of Rubens' compositions a torso concentrates on the blonde flesh as much light as possible, avoiding the crude pallor of wax. On the salient points where the light falls directly the flesh takes a milky lustre, produced by white and bright yellow; where the light slips off, its touch spreads iridescent blues, a delicate veil of ultramarine. On brown flesh this blue becomes less strong, and on the flesh of a dead body, it is accentuated and turns to green and violet, if necessary. It is the use of this cold, diaphanous colour which gives so much freshness to Rubens' nudes. Jordaens, who neglected it, paints heavy, opaque flesh

like baked brick, and the nudes of Van Dyck are pale ivory and yellow. In the masters' work only do they have a transparency which reveals the flow of life within, like light behind a porcelain shade.

He keeps the warm, reddish colours for the real shadows, but these shadows are never opaque, however deep they may be. They are lightly rubbed in, in contrast to the thick painting of Correggio and the Venetians, and are always touched by a reflection of bright vermilion. Rubens, who puts no red in his lights, is generous with it here, because red, which is heavy and sombre in light, becomes a luminous and transparent colour in the shadow. He carried the idea so far that even in his drawings, when there is a touch of red chalk, it is used in the shadow of a fold of flesh. If he paints a corpse he is not content with dark lead-coloured tones, but makes the blood of the wounds glow on the dead skin. Light and transparency are everywhere, and the flesh is modelled by exquisite and delicate shades. All this was a revolution in Art which greatly scandalised the critics. Bellori says that Felibien in the second half of the seventeenth century found fault with an art so different from the Italian. "In the colour the flesh tints are often so strong and so detached from each other that they seem like spots,

and in the reflections the light makes the bodies seem diaphanous and transparent."[1]

Rubens possessed, more than most painters, that infallible skill of hand which is as necessary to a decorator as ease of speech is to an orator. His work is always accurate and quick, yet alive with a spirit which puts soul into the small pictures and eloquence into the large ones. Some of his paintings (*The Return of the Prodigal*, Antwerp) are nothing but a grisaille in bitumen and dull green hardly lighted by a few spots of vermilion and black. In this picture the correctness and nervous precision of touch have brought out of the half darkness of a shed, the many forms enveloped in shadow. The brush moves alert and skillful, and we see the coat of a horse, the shoulder of a cow, the hairy, spotted nakedness of a pig, spiders' webs and hanging dusty rags, the worn leather of a halter or gleam of a curb chain.

Without the least suggestion of effort, the careful and intelligent handling of the little picture broadens it until it grows into a huge composition. Rubens "confessed himself to be by instinct more fitted to make large compositions than little curiosities."[2] His hand was obedient enough and his eye suffi-

[1] *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres*, II., p. 118.
[2] Letter to William Trumbull, 13 Sept., 1621.

ciently sure to paint an enormous canvas with as much fire as a simple sketch. His improvisations, even when colossal, are painted directly and without change. The *Magi* at Antwerp and the *Way of the Cross* at Brussels, two of his largest canvases, are painted from end to end in large spots, expressive and never retouched, used with such perfect mastery that they do not have to be reduced even when rendering the nude, where correctness of form is so necessary that even the most fiery painters restrain themselves and become careful and timid. Rubens, on the contrary, as in the fishermen of Malines and the sirens of the *Landing of Marie de Médicis*, seems only more alert, more inspired and his hand more light, attentive and sure.

This virtuosity is not nervousness. We never find here those sharp, quick touches of the brush which delight us in Hals and show a sort of feverish impatience. Rubens is calm and master of himself; his execution is rapid but not brusque. With a quiet hand he lets loose a tumult of colours and lines. His work, in spite of its rapidity, has an air of finish. He generally used a panel of polished wood on which the oily fluid colour only left a smooth, thin covering. Not that he feared thick paint, but he saved it for the strong lights, the sheen of steel or silk, the gleam on a tear or a drop of blood or the foaming crest of

a wave. His pliant brush and flowing colours often give an unctuous touch, mingled in spite of its firmness, solid in spite of its softness. In some of his pictures which seem to be executed with less control than the others the only real difference consists of a coarser canvas, thick paint and a stiff brush.

Rubens' compositions are always extremely simple and have been planned without effort; even the beginnings of the work are easy. When the action is simple it is all in the attitude of one or two figures, and the painter has given them without difficulty poses that are noble and graceful as well as expressive. Even when there are a number of people on the scene the composition remains uncomplex. A circle of attentive faces surrounds a single action, and turns towards the most luminous part of the canvas. His most beautiful pictures are grouped in this way: *The Descent from the Cross*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *Communion of St. Francis*, *St. Ambrose and Theodosius*, *Coronation of Marie de Médicis*, *St. George* on the tomb of the painter. Like ourselves, all these people have come to see an imposing spectacle or to be moved by a tragic scene. Their feelings are not generally expressed in their faces, yet nothing can be more expressive than a face painted by Rubens. The secret of his art lies in the universal practice of the Flemish school of choosing typi-

THE WAY OF THE CROSS
Brussels Museum (completed in 1637)

cal models, and taking nothing from their character. In this lay their great difference from the French and Italian artists. Felibien does not fail to find fault with Rubens' figures for being "ordinary and common, not well-proportioned and beautiful." It was precisely because he took expressive faces from nature that Rubens did not have, like Poussin and Le Brun, to fall back on a theatrical mechanism that was often caricature. It was from around him, in his house, in his city, in the harbour, or in the country around Antwerp, that he found the men and women, the children and animals, all the creatures human and divine which peopled his world. Some of them pass once through his work and then disappear, others we grow familiar with in the pictures of the same epoch. It is probably this habit, which explains the criticism of Felibien and Bellori, that "all his faces look alike." Because of their marked personality these people of Rubens' stay in our memory. One remembers the face of his Magdalen, of his old men, his warriors and his executioners, and recognises them again in another picture of the same period. In the pictures of Poussin and Le Brun, in spite of their abstract likeness, the faces do not annoy us by their uniformity. They have not the character of a living type which alone makes us see and recognise the individual.

A superb, blonde creature, rounded and golden, exuberant in joy and sorrow, was for a long time his favourite type of feminine beauty, until the coming of his second wife, Helena Fourment. As Magdalen she sobbed at the foot of the cross, as nymph she frolicked gayly in the sunshine, as nereid she made the water boil around her lithe movements. Isabella Brandt is never more than a figure in the second plan; she only shows herself to lighten some corner of the composition with her keen eyes and kindly face. She strayed by some chance into the drunken cortège of Silenus with the same amusement in her face and dimples around her smile. Rubens' sons soon became regular figures in the drama, and here and there in the garlands of loves or the mythological scenes the childish faces of Albert and Nicholas appear. Albert, as a charming page, holds the mantle of one of the Magi at Malines; Nicholas the younger, chubby and pouting, or wide awake and smiling, is often seen in the history of Marie de Médicis. He fills the rôle of a little love, plays with armour, presents the portrait to the Queen and rides allegorical lions at the wedding. An ugly old woman, Rubens' servant, with hanging cheeks and crooked nose, figures in almost all of the holy families. She grows older as her master's list of paintings lengthens, and in *Cyrus and Thomyris* in

the Louvre, she is a terrible old hag, bearded and toothless. Rubens knew how to choose the right actors for his dramas. Of a tall old man, red-faced, grey-bearded, he made a river god or a St. Ambrose; if his beard is a little whiter and his air more dignified, he is a prophet—unless, heavy and fat, he is used as a jovial drunkard.

For his helmeted warriors, his hunters and his executioners, the painter had always models who were dark and hairy, with an air of energy and fierceness. During several years, at the period of the Silenus processions and the Magi, a superb negro posed often for him, and he loved to render the brown colouring, the leathery skin with black reflections, his deer's nostrils and great purple lips, parted with the speechless smile of a good-natured dog (*Study of Negroes*, Brussels). If Rubens saw a Spanish head, bony, with sunken cheeks and scanty beard and brilliant little eyes, there appeared in one of his groups an ascetic Franciscan. Of a man with moist lips and eyes and a lewd laugh he made a satyr; a stupid, dull face became a beadle.

Rubens' faun was no more varied, nor more real than his humans. In all the hunts and allegorical, mythological or historical scenes there are not only peacocks and horses and dogs, but also tigers and lions and crocodiles, and all these animals have been

studied from nature. There are more or less authentic anecdotes about how Rubens profited by menageries that passed through Antwerp. In his own house he kept dogs, great solidly built Danes and little curled poodles whom he allowed to assist at the most solemn events of history (*Crowning of Marie de Médicis*, *Erection of the Cross*); in the garden lived the peacocks who always escorted his Junos, and in the stable two horses—always the same—carried his heroes (*Daughters of Leucippus*, *Lance Thrust*), and even those of Van Dyck, two heavy beasts, one a bright bay and the other a dapper grey. In Rubens' work Pegasus himself was painted from nature.

His imagination is realistic, and in his marvellous decorations there is nothing which is not a reproduction of the things which surround his own life. The architecture is often only an Italian portico which he had in his garden (*St. Ambrose and Theodosius*, *Flight of Lot*). His apotheoses are in effects of real light, and the landscape which shows under the Olympian cloud as it rises is only the watery green and blue of a Flemish horizon.

Rubens went back to the original tradition of the Netherland school to make fiction out of all that was most true and most picturesque in nature. His weakness only showed when he neglected this principle; in certain large works and a few small pic-

THE RAPE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF LEUCIPPUS

Old Pinakothek, Munich (1619–1620)

tures he did not treat the Virgin with the same realism as his other figures; he neglected his model because he could not quite leave the conventional type. He made the skin whiter and the lips redder, but he also raised and rounded the eyelid in the Italian manner. The painting is characterless and banal, and the vivacity of the Child Jesus throws into even more relief the vague personality of his mother. He generally treated his gods and kings with more familiarity, making princesses out of superb peasants, for his imagination could transform simple humanity into the heroic and give distinction to common life.

With all his work Rubens could not fill all his orders, and following the custom of the great Italian masters of the Renaissance, he organised groups of apprentices to work under his direction. A Danish doctor, Otto Sperling, who was passing through Antwerp in 1621 and visited his atelier, says: "We saw also a great room without windows which received light only through an opening in the ceiling. In this room were gathered many young painters, each working at a different picture, for which M. Rubens had made a drawing in chalk and indicated the tones here and there with colour. These young men painted the picture, which later Rubens finished himself."

When Rubens sold his pictures he never pretended that the work was all by his own hand. When he offered Sir Dudley Carleton some paintings in exchange for a collection of antiques, his estimate of their value was in proportion to the amount that he had done himself. The pupils had collaborated more or less; a Prometheus is "by his hand and the eagle by Snyders"; a "Daniel surrounded by many lions, studied from nature, is entirely his own work." In this way he separated his own painting from that of his pupils, reserving, as his memoirs show, the figures for himself and leaving the accessories and landscapes to a pupil "distinguished in that kind of work." Sometimes the painter is "his best pupil," but he retouches it entirely with his own hand. No picture left his studio until he had worked enough on it "for it to pass for an original." The value of his collaborators was far above that of ordinary pupils; names like Wildens, van Thulden, van Uden, van Egmont are worthy to be remembered and those of Van Dyck and Snyders are famous.

Each had some special skill by which he showed himself worthy of the master. In painting still life, fruits or animals from nature, they had learnt accuracy of eye and superior skill of hand. Rubens furnished the composition, and his sketch indicated the general colour, leaving nothing to the initiative

of his collaborators except within the limits of their own specialty. At the first glance this seems a surprising system, and it would be absurd to say that Rubens' works had always gained by it. It is less incomprehensible here than it would be in any other atelier. Rubens' pictures differed from each other only in rearrangements of the same elements. When a sketch had once been made, it developed almost by natural growth into a large composition in which each motif led to an accepted result. Rubens "is in the position of a workman who does the thing that he knows without searching in the infinite for perfection. His sublime ideas are translated into forms which the superficial find monotonous. . . . This monotony is not displeasing to a man who has penetrated into the secrets of art."[1]

The drawbacks of this sort of collaboration which is forced upon almost all great decorators are not without their compensations. Between the original conception, expressed by the sketch and the necessary last touches of the brush, is a long, weary process, purely material, and all the longer and less significant because it is apt to stifle the inspiration with physical fatigue. It is in this that the help of others is valuable. It saved Rubens from wasting

[1] Delacroix—Journal Jan. 27, 1852.

his vigour in rubbing in backgrounds, or vast architectural settings. At the moment when he put on the canvas the last characteristic touches which give the soul of the artist to his work, his eyes had all their freshness of impression and his hand all its eagerness and skill. This is why his paintings are never heavy, never weary, and in spite of their size keep always the same facility and exquisite flavour of youth.

Since his marriage and settlement in his house on the Wapper, there had been no events in Rubens' life until 1626, when Isabella Brandt died. His biography is simply a list of his pictures.

They were always astonishing in their number and variety. How did Rubens manage to produce so much without showing fatigue or even effort? In saving his strength. He was a rich and frugal steward. When a certain subject was ordered he did not trouble to invent the composition, but frankly borrowed motifs and personages from the Flemish and Italian schools, (Descents from the Cross, Last Judgments, Assumptions, Magi, Madonnas). Then he never dropped an idea till he thought it had given him all the use it could. The same motif would haunt his imagination for a long time, and appear in the pictures of a period, many of which

seem to be studies for a work which will be the final expression. A series of pictures seems to be born from a common source until suddenly, completely master of his idea, he creates in a day of inspiration the *Magi* of Antwerp, or the *Way of the Cross* of Brussels. By a natural growth the theme has become richer and clearer and more sure, and some day the masterpiece drops from it, spontaneously, like a beautiful ripe fruit.

In this way Rubens' works often group themselves by their subject and by their date, (the Descents from the Cross, Assumptions, Adorations of the Magi), and it is possible in studying to follow a methodical order without interfering with the chronology.

CHAPTER III

CRUCIFIXIONS

In 1611 Rubens was commissioned to decorate the Altar of the Guild of Arquebusiers in the Cathedral of Antwerp. The patron of this Brotherhood was St. Christopher, and instead of following the simple legend, Rubens chose to enlarge his subject by etymological analogies. As the Greek name of Christopher signified Carrier of Christ, he used for his subjects the people who had carried the body of Jesus. As in the *Elevation of the Cross*, he had five pictures to paint; a central panel and the two faces of each wing. He put the *Descent from the Cross* in the centre, the *Visitation* on the left and the *Presentation at the Temple* on the right. When closed the triptych showed on one side a gigantic figure of St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child and on the other a Hermit lighting the Saint's way with a lantern. This plan was approved and the agreement signed on September 7, 1611, and Rubens began the work at once. From time to time the

THE WALK IN THE GARDEN

Old Pinakothek, Munich (1630–1631)

heads of the Brotherhood came to his studio and watched the painting to be sure that the material used was good and the panels "free from sap."

In one year (September 12, 1612) the central picture of the *Descent from the Cross* was finished and placed in the Cathedral; two years later the two wings were joined to it, and the whole was consecrated with great ceremony July 22, 1614. According to the contract Rubens received 2,800 florins and a pair of gloves was presented to Isabella Brandt. The triptych is still in the Cathedral for which it was painted.

The subject which Rubens chose for the central picture had been treated many times, for the Flemish Primitives loved that most pathetic of the scenes of the Passion, and the Italian painters had found in it an opportunity for heroic and beautiful poses.

Rubens, who at this moment was quite as much Italian as Fleming, saw what such a subject offered in both plastic and moral effects, and tried to make each one serve the other. Before his time, in Florence as in Bruges and Cologne, all painters had divided the composition into two distinct parts. On the one side the body is being carefully detached from the Cross and the Virgin sinks fainting, surrounded by St. John and the holy women who minister to her.

Here the two actions are brought together. Here the same eyes watch the majestic descent of the Crucified Christ, and weep for the lost son and master; the same hands check the fall of the dead body and comfort the beloved Sufferer. Slowly the corpse slips down the white slope of the shroud. A strange tragic light models the gracefully placed body, the face worn by pain and the closed eyelids; the same light which, falling on two beautiful women's faces, reveals the anguish of the Virgin and the passionate grief of the Magdalen. In the *Elevation of the Cross* the exaggerated muscular action around a motionless crucified figure emphasised the ferocity of the executioners and the resignation of the Martyr. Even more touching is the lassitude of the superb body, indifferent alike to the reverent solicitude of the disciples and the mute appeal of their love.

The painting is thoroughly Fleming in that it expresses the action and suffering of people of our own race. It transposes miraculous and sacred events into a drama of human tenderness. But this humanity is greater than ours, the figures are more beautiful and the emotions more noble. Human sorrow shows frankly in the troubled faces and streaming eyes, but the passionate gestures are full of rhythm, and all the anguish is harmonised in

the sadness of one majestic tragedy. The relationship to Roger van der Weyden and Quentin Matsys would be even more evident if an entirely foreign training had not come between the heir and his ancestors.

The Primitives placed their figures in the positions which seemed to them most expressive without any other thought of grouping. The perfection of the execution is the naïve homage of their piety. Rubens had brought from the foreign schools new methods of expression. He knew how to paint in a large manner, and to handle easily the difficulties of such art. He understood how to generalise line and colour and how to bring a large composition together by giving it unity and balance. Notice how ingeniously he stages his figures at different heights, and how naturally he surrounds the body in the centre without cloaking any figure or twisting any attitude. More than all he understood dividing his light. He knew how a painter can save the high light for important episodes, how he can leave the greater part of the canvas in half tones, and when necessary lift and accent the whcle composition by vigorous shadows. In this picture he has perhaps abused that last means, following the example of Caravaggio.

His Italian habits have not yet disappeared.

Everything grows lighter in his other paintings of the same subject, the dark green of the Magdalen's dress becomes a beautiful luminous yellow, St. John's red robe glows more brightly, there are more gleams in the shadows, more luminousness, more life. The colours are less flat and smooth, the contours less sharp and the brush freer.

This picture had great success, and in later years Rubens was often commissioned to paint the same subject again, but none of these later pictures exactly reproduced the one at Antwerp. The attitudes vary, though the people are the same types and express the same emotions. The *Descent from the Cross* in the Musée of Lille, which is hardly less beautiful than that in Antwerp, emphasises the emotional quality of the first work. The body of Christ is slipping and the hands of his Mother hold him up. The right arm hangs like a dead thing and with a gesture of enveloping love, the Magdalen lifts it to press a last kiss. Nothing could be more touching than her face, radiant with youth, bending to caress softly, between her sobs, that thin, pallid hand. This splendid young creature is a favourite creation of Rubens. He never fails to cast her at the foot of the cross, despairing and superb, with disordered gold hair, more lovely and touching because of her grief.

The motive of the dead body also interested him greatly. His Christs are innumerable, those that are sketched upright on the cross against an inky sky, and those that are laid out relaxed on the stones of the tomb.

It is necessary to look at his *Christ on the Straw* (Musée of Antwerp) to realise with what pleasure his brush painted that beautiful greenish body, touched with blood spots, the torso all luminous, but modelled at the same time into imperceptible reflections of violet, blue, rose and green, defining with precision all its form and articulation. The head hangs heavy and twisted, and in the hair and beard, rubbed in simply with bitumen, clots of blood give a sombre vermilion light.

Rubens' exuberant fancy shows itself more and more, and the gravity, which in the Antwerp altar-piece controlled the ardour of his imagination, melts before it. Now when he paints a corpse, even that of Jesus Christ, his mind is less composed and his eye is more amused by the brilliant effect of colour. On the cool grey of the linen, the dead flesh shows a play of limpid, almost joyous colour.

Another important work of this time, the *Coup de Lance,* in which the brutality of the *Elevation of the Cross* is combined with the tender feeling of the *Descent,* shows this increasing vehemence. Regu-

larity of composition has been abandoned, the attitudes are less staid and logical, and it is evident that when his brush began to cover the vast canvas all the episodes of the composition had not been thought out. Spectators and outsiders who had interested the master for a moment are added. In especial the light is used less sparingly. Formerly Rubens had followed Caravaggio in leaving much shadow around the edges of the picture, so that a little light in the centre would give the eye a pleasure that was harmonious, if rather meagre. Now the gloom is penetrated by the light of day and cut by sharp gleams, and the sky is no longer uniformly obscure. In the shadows on the right shine tortured bodies and sorrowful faces; against the light on the left the dark silhouettes of horsemen with fierce, hairy faces rise; in the centre a Magdalen, warm and golden. At every point silk glistens, and steel gleams, and light bursts out uncontrolled, superb and tragic like the groans and sobs around the pale, majestic figure of the Christ.

More light and therefore more colour, more liberty and therefore more ease in the handling. Rubens' art growing each day more supple and richer loses the method learnt at Rome and at Bologna and brings more truth and life to the service of his glorious visions.

LE COUP DE LANCE
Antwerp Museum (1620)

CHAPTER IV

MYTHOLOGICAL PICTURES

FROMENTIN says that Olympus bored Rubens. The great number of pictures with mythological subjects which were not demanded of him prove the contrary. These charming paintings, generally on smaller panels than his altar-pieces, seem to be works of pure pleasure in which Rubens amused himself and wholly delighted all amateurs. He even introduced pagan gods into places where they were not needed. His figures which are not mythological, as that of Christ, often owe part of their majestic robustness to the Jupiter of Greek and Roman sculpture, and it is easy to recognise in certain St. Sebastiens the grace of the fauns and Apollos of Praxiteles leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree. By constant intellectual cultivation Rubens kept in touch with the philosophers and poets of antiquity, and the sight of a relic of the past gave him all the pleasure of a devout archæologist. It would be strange if he had not felt the classic charm

of the ancient religions or had not repeated some of the motives that he found in Rome, either from copies which he had made or from originals in his own collection, and a careful analysis will show in his work many distinct suggestions of classic sculpture.

For all the secondary divinities, river nymphs, satyrs, scattered through his large compositions, as well as for his higher gods, Jupiter or Apollo, who hold principal rôles, he followed the type of the antique statues of bas-reliefs. He repeated the leonine head with low, flat forehead, the firmly drawn mouth and vigorous modelling of the classic Jupiter, making his hair brown, his beard bushy, the mantle across his knees a solid red; and using his torso as an opportunity to paint powerful pectoral muscles. His hairy, dripping Neptunes are treated in the same way, and the Apollo of the *Government of the Queen* in the Médici gallery is almost an exact copy of the Apollo Belvedere. He has the same pose with the chest thrown forward and the head turned towards the arm which holds the bow, only the legs are slightly changed to give more spring to the body. A picture of the *Death of Seneca* reproduces exactly a statue now in the Pinakothek at Munich.

But in spite of these frank copies it is certain that classic art had very little real influence on Rubens. One hesitates to recognise the antique

marble as the inspiration of his vigorous, living figures, because in utilising these models he has not sacrificed any peculiar demands of his own technique. Out of these gods of marble and bronze he has made beings of flesh and blood; he has taken the hard and polished coldness from the statue, and by transparent shadows and soft curves and graceful roundness of modelling he has expressed the moist and living surface of the human body, and by this change alone made the copy almost unrecognisable.

Because of this realism and intensity of physical life Rubens' gods have often been found shocking, but the cause was not any lack of capacity in the artist to appreciate the purity of the Greek and Roman forms. No one could have more easily reproduced the elegant outlines of an Antinous, or a study in grisaille of the face of Niobe; but that was a danger to be avoided.

Here is a quotation made by de Piles from a critical essay in Latin written by Rubens—and now lost: "There are some painters for whom this copying of statues is extremely useful, but for others it is dangerous to the point of stupefying their art. In my opinion to reach perfection it is necessary not only to know antique sculpture, but to have understood, as it were, its intimate meaning. But this knowledge must be used with judgment, distracting the

mind entirely from the statue itself, because many unskillful artists and even some with talent can not distinguish form from substance, nor understand the medium of the sculptor."

Thus it was not only by instinct but by reason and will that Rubens turned directly to nature for his supernatural beings, and that he rejected the dreary method so long used by the French school of subordinating colour and limiting the paint to a feeble repetition of what the sculptor had already said in stone. He not only transformed the antique to meet the demands of his technique, but adjusted it to his own personal taste.

With him, the gods, already cosmopolitan, submitted to a final transformation and were naturalised Flemings. There is no real anachronism in this. It is not ridiculous to bring back again into natural life all those beautiful creatures of legend, who symbolise the birth of the forces of nature.

Mythology, which had grown old and decrepit in the French and Italian art of the seventeenth century, was dipped again in its natural source, to find there a new youth. Undoubtedly the gods lost some of their poetry of line, nobleness of pose and serenity of soul; like other creatures of Rubens they have more life than distinction, but the painter still knew how to differentiate the beautiful proportions

DIANA AND CALLISTO
The Prado, Madrid (1638–1640)

of a Greek god and the rather dense materialism of a Fleming. In that same study which de Piles knew, he explains the relation between life and antique art: "By the violent exercise of the palestra and the gymnasium men were pushed not only to sweat, but to extreme fatigue. Thanks to such training, grace and freedom and harmony of movement were secured." Flemish beauty, on the contrary, is that of a body which is indolent and overnourished. Is it possible to correct one by the other?

To judge of this, examine successively the two *Triumphs of Truth* in the Louvre by painters of the opposing schools, and compare the pale cold statue of Poussin with the robust gallant of Rubens. If the latter seems to treat the august divinity rather familiarly, is not the other more or less paralysed by superstitious devotion?

This is undoubtedly why Rubens spent less time on the serene heights of Olympus than in the terrestrial valleys and sacred woods where nymphs and satyrs rioted joyously, and all the gods who came down mingled in the life of mortals, a prey to the weakness and passions of humanity.

His brush lingered tenderly on the body of a beautiful goddess conquered by love. He liked to contrast a milk-white skin with the brown, muscular

limbs of a man. He related without dullness the gallantries of the gods.

Et depuis le chaos les amours immortelles!

Jupiter embracing the surprised Callisto, Ixion duped by Juno's ruse, Meleager presenting the boar's head to Atalanta, Perseus rescuing a frightened Andromeda, or Venus pleading with Adonis as he departs for the chase. The daughters of Leucippus show the graceful, vigorous lines of their bodies as they struggle in the brutal grasp of the Dioscures, and in luxuriant thickets huntresses sleep from weariness, or fly madly from the pursuit of some lewd and jeering satyr. Such are the scenes to which Rubens lent his warm and virile temperament.

But his art really reached the feeling which gives new life to a myth in the Silenus Series (St. Petersburg, Berlin, London), particularly in the *Progress of Silenus* of the Munich Pinakothek. In this picture Rubens has pushed freedom to licence; there is not a touch of the brush, an unctuous curve, a light on a wet lip, that has not given the painter pleasure. In the centre an old Silenus, fat, slimy, hairy, with leering eye and brutal face, advances heavily, pushed by an escort of fauns, nymphs and old women, who steer his staggering course; and to help support his drunken body a negro pushes with

THE PROGRESS OF SILENUS
Old Pinakothek, Munich (1618–1620)

his hard hand into the heavy fat. In front a shapeless female faun sinks her soft body over two little fauns, already horned and hoofed, who hang, gorged with milk, at her breasts. Here the vehemence of Rubens' talent has displayed itself freely, animating this vulgarity with all its lyric power. The poetic tradition and the genius of the painter were at one in unbridling the exuberant joyousness of this bestial incarnation of Silenus as a Flemish god.

Mythology delighted Rubens by the splendours of its nudeness, and his pleasure was complete when he could put the bodies into violent motion, as in the *Battle of the Amazons* (Munich). A disorderly flight over a bridge with horses that gallop and rear and bite, women who resist desperately and sink wounded or dead, two or three simple episodes around which are entangled bodies that struggle and flee and fall—this is a little composition where Rubens has remembered da Vinci, Raphael and Titian, but which he has lived and made his own for the display of beauty and physical force which it required.

It is to this desire to throw human bodies into violent positions that must be attributed the many Hunting Scenes which came from Rubens' atelier. This subject lends itself to a free play of brutality

and the imagination of the painter could pile up in them his "inventions of genius" (Delacroix). *Lion, Tiger, Hippopotamus Hunts* (Munich, Dresden, Augsburg), great tawny roaring beasts, frightened horses, hunters shouting and striking, all the contortions of rage and fear and suffering savagely intermingled. Sometimes he hurled a pack of hounds with hunters against a boar and put across in front of them an obstacle of some sort, like the branching trunk of a dead tree, to break the monotony of a parallel composition, or varied the accidents of the chase by obstacles to be climbed, falls and leaps increasing the fierceness of the pursuit and struggle; or again in a landscape of large trees he set an attack on a boar at bay with dogs that tear, peasants that prod with spears, and horsemen rushing at full speed, while a vagabond blows on a horn with all the enthusiasm of a joyous Triton (*Boar Hunt*, Dresden).

For the same reason Rubens often borrowed Michelangelo's composition of the last judgment (*The Fall of the Damned, The Small Last Judgment*, Munich). He had brought from Rome the memory of that tragic fresco of the Sistine Chapel and modified it to give the unity of one great movement to that scattering of unchained forces.

The archangels in a flight like a vertical thunderbolt are precipitated from above onto the damned,

THE SMALLER LAST JUDGMENT

Old Pinakothek, Munich (about 1615)

and scourge them furiously. From below the demons bound, clutch, breaking off clusters of humans, who roll down into the gulf. In the centre a cataract of nude figures sweeps across the canvas like a quick vision, leaving unforgettable glimpses of strange attitudes of fear and vertigo. Vile monsters seize the bodies of beautiful sinners; white young flesh writhes under the torture. The temperament of the painter has given a new meaning to this scene. It is a drama of strength and energy, a furious revolt of life against the horror of death.

CHAPTER V

SAINTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

REMEMBERING the religious painting of the Primitive Flemings and Italians, it is difficult to find in the huge canvases of Rubens that feeling of naïve faith which had made in the past of skillful painting an act of piety. The old illuminator, when he is touching the face of the Blessed Virgin or the Lord Jesus, is humble and worshipping, and, if he is too well trained to let his brush tremble, at least there is in his work a touching gravity and something like the ardour of a fervent prayer.

In Rubens I find always the same skill and the same alert confidence, as of an artist entirely at ease with his subject. Religion interested him only when it touched humanity; and his realism is the antipodes of the spiritual. Only when he paints the Passion of Christ, the miracles and the martyrs does he reach a beauty that is moving. The stories of the evangelists and the lives of the saints he has constructed from scenes of common life. It is

in the streets that he finds his apostles without a halo, and even in the dead body of Christ he puts nothing that promises the miracle of the resurrection.

Is this the effect of indifference or lack of religious feeling? His private life was certainly not that of an infidel, but he lived in an astounding century, when the minds of men were devout, but their art was not Christian. Take the tragedies of Corneille, for instance, with religious subjects and not a line or a sentence that could not fit equally well into a purely pagan drama. Fervent Catholics, severe and punctilious in their religious duties, these men never mixed their religion with their imagination or with any of the feelings which arouse emotion and make the life of art. Their faith is solid and defined, incompatible not only with the doubts of mystery and the fictions of poetry, but also with all mysterious emotions. In a life such as Rubens', full of steady work and intense production, no break in the equilibrium of thought and action was possible, certainly none to the advantage of the former. The habit of his art and the nature of his religion combined to make him represent all sacred subjects under their historical or human aspects.

From 1610 to 1625 religious pictures held the most important plan in his work. These were

large, decorative canvases, imposing in style and treatment, as suited the taste and faith of the moment. Destined always for the same use, they were composed in much the same manner: very large picture, placed high, requiring simple masses, distinct and easily understood from a distance. Rubens set his personages in architectural frames, making it possible to place one group above another and to fill the canvas without empty spaces or confusion. *St. Francis Xavier*, *St. Ignatius* (Vienna), *St. Bavon* (Ghent) and *St. Roch* (Alost) revive the dead, give alms, and heal the plague-stricken, and in all these pictures the same system places the saint well in view. The suppliants are grouped at the foot of the composition and wait with groans and lifted arms in hope of the miracle. The saint dominates the picture in a dramatic pose, either on the steps of the altar, on a throne or on the top of a staircase; in spite of differences in setting and costumes from armoured royalists and mitred bishops with chatelaines in green to a simple pilgrim in a sombre prison, as in the picture at Vienna, the same plan is always recognisable—a wise and solid composition, excellent and rather cold painting.

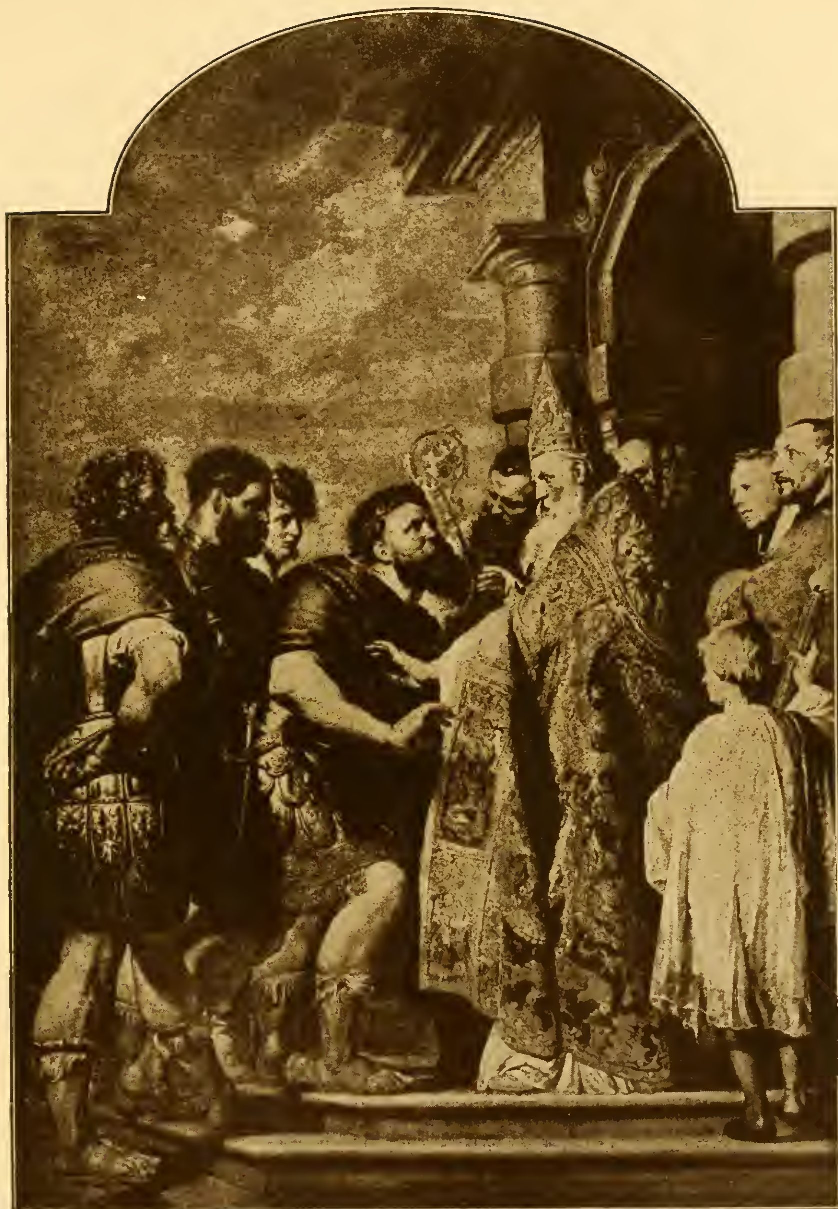
Sometimes these sacred personages seemed to have interested him a little more, as in the *St.*

Ambrose and Theodosius (Vienna), the *Communion of St. Francis* (Antwerp), and still more in the *Calling of St. Peter* or *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (Malines). The *Miraculous Draught* gave Rubens a chance to paint a fishing scene rather than a miracle, and the beauty of the picture is entirely in its realism. He did not consider the religious significance of the scene at all, but simply treated it as a real action and made of it a bit of life, vigorous, violent and harsh. Some fishermen, with great effort, drag in a net filled to breaking with fish. One of them in a rough, red smock, his high boots deep in the water, leans back with one leg thrust forward and pulls the heavy net with all the force of his outstretched arms and stiffened body. Another helps him, bent over the edge of the boat, his round face wrinkled by the effort and a laugh of pleasure at the unexpected catch. A third pushing on a boat hook stands out against an ink-black wave in a pose of life. Peter, humble and eclipsed, is devoutly thanking an insignificant Jesus. Nothing is lacking to the scene except the presence of the divine and spiritual. The fishermen of Malines, who had ordered the picture, must have been delighted to recognise the fine fish, slimy and flapping, and to see themselves drawn to life, the same and yet glorified.

The *Last Communion of St. Francis*, on the contrary, is restrained and grave. Here the colour scheme is narrowed and all gay contrasts suppressed. For once Rubens was moved by his subject. The coarse woollen cloth of the Franciscan replaced the gay stuffs of fête days, and the picture is like a cameo of grey and brown tints, lighted only by sorrowing faces and the dying body of the saint. But in spite of this restricted use of colour, there are no opaque shadows in the Caravaggio manner; the painting is rich in delicate tones and fine transparency, beautiful at once in austerity and tenderness.

The *St. Ambrose Forbidding Theodosius* to enter the Temple ranks also as one of Rubens' best works by its simple grandeur. The tall greybeard, resplendent in his mitre and robes, firmly but gently repels the fawning trooper Emperor, who bends before him with a false smile. Out of the group of calm, interested clerks, the brutal soldiers, grumbling at the audacity of the bishop, and a few expressive figures simply opposed, Rubens has made a vivid drama and built up a beautiful decoration.

Among these church pictures there is one subject, very often repeated, which seems to have peculiarly fitted the genius of the painter, as it did the religious taste of the time, the *Assumption of the*



SAINT AMBROSE AND THEODOSIUS

Imperial Museum, Vienna (about 1618)

Virgin. Brussels, Dresden, Vienna, Antwerp, all have variations of this theme. Rubens borrowed from Titian the composition of his famous picture, but altered it slightly by suppressing the figure of God the Father, which in the Venetian picture receives the Virgin, and so giving the composition two instead of three stages. It is in consequence less scattered, and the approach of heavenly bliss is expressed only by an increasing glow and light. As always with Rubens, there is more motion or movement than in the model, and less formality. The subject has great advantages decoratively, as it permits a very high canvas filled by two groups of figures in simple attitudes with evident significance; below are the animated figures and violent gestures of those left behind, and above is the radiant flight into heaven.

But best of all, the *Assumption* gave Rubens a chance to paint children in the garland of angels which surrounds the Virgin's progress. He loved to ornament his compositions with dimpled little bodies, and his rapid manner of painting rendered perfectly their artless, unskilled sprightliness and the pretty movements of their plump little limbs, and his delicate, clear colour expressed easily the soft freshness of young flesh modelled by light shadows. He loved to toss a naked baby into a

ray of light. His amours and chubby angels tumble about like little animals, abandoned to the joy of frolicking.

This same gaiety animates the beautiful *Assumption* of the high altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame at Antwerp. Titian's composition is greatly changed. The groups are less compact, and though at the base of the picture the apostles form a solid enough mass, bending the fine lines of their mantles over the empty tomb, even they are not quite close; the light penetrates the crowd to the ground, illuminating not only the apostles' woollen cloaks, but also the shining robes of some graceful female saints. Between the two sombre and tragic pictures of the *Elevation* and the *Descent from the Cross*, the *Assumption* has smiling radiance. It is all light and transparent, resplendent freshness. There is in it that great note of joy which Rubens' art naturally expressed when he had no object but his own satisfaction. A lovely lady in delicate, diaphanous robes, her hair unbound and her face full of ecstasy, raised by a fluttering swarm of angels, an iridescent, joyous vision mounting to heaven like the song of a lark.

CHAPTER VI

ADORATIONS OF THE MAGI

ONE subject was sure to tempt Rubens, The *Adoration of the Magi.* For a long time the popular imagination had enriched this scene with strange magnificence. It was to most an evocation of all the splendours of the Orient, and a naïve tradition had bestowed princely and ecclesiastical pomp and luxury upon the three good kings, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar. A very simple scene in a setting of rich stuffs and gleaming gold and jewels. No spectacle could have been more marvellous or better adapted to painting.

Rubens treated it often, just after his return from Italy, for the Hôtel de Ville at Antwerp (now at Madrid), the Capucines of Tournai (this picture is now at Brussels), for the Church of St. John at Malines (still in that church), for the Abbey of St. Michael at Antwerp (now in the Museum) and for the Church of the Annunciation at Brussels (now in the Louvre). He also painted the shepherds rever-

ently laying their modest offering at the feet of the Holy Child, but his preference was for the gorgeous Magi, superb as conquerors, bedecked like archbishops. At first he overloaded the scene giving too prominent a rôle to a pair of athletic porters, a reminiscence of Italy, who had no effect in the setting of richness and splendour. Later he left out these unnecessary and unimposing figures or relegated them to the second plan where they were packed in a crowd at the back, and sketched their eager, curious faces as badly placed spectators who want to see more. In the front the great Magi, white, yellow and red, forming a distinct group, gather respectfully before the Virgin, received by the little shining Child, and the miraculous light illumines their good, bearded, bowed faces, which are moved with emotion.

The wavering light of torches throws sudden lights and shadows over the crowd behind, making eyes shine out and armour gleam, showing a superb turban, a negro's laugh, or a beautiful page, which gives to this strange setting, where ornate columns mingle with worm-eaten beams, a magical gaiety, the naïve luxury of a humble Christmas celebration.

But the theme was not exhausted in Rubens' imagination, and one happy day the Magi came again to life on his canvas, more gorgeous than ever.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI
Antwerp Museum (1624)

Tradition says that he took only thirteen days to paint, entirely with his own hand, the great masterpiece at Antwerp. No more shadows, the whole picture is in clear day, brilliant light penetrates every corner of the canvas, revealing enchanting details, showing the skill and vigour of faultless painting. Never was a mind more inspired or a hand more sure, and this studied work seems to have been executed as rapidly as it was conceived. The painter worked with the same dash as if he were sketching a simple study, and covered the immense canvas from corner to corner with the same pleasure, without weakness or fatigue or heaviness, never without ideas—and rare ones—and never losing in the mass of details the main object at which he was aiming. The immense setting has the same ease and magnificence throughout. The brocades and laces, precious stones and carved vases, the steel of casques, the transparent robes where soft white melts into purple shadows, the exquisite modulation of a violet velvet on the gold of a dalmatic, all in light, pure touches, which strike and impress you, play, melt, and separate themselves in a gay clearness of atmosphere, treasures of which a fraction would make the fortune of any other painter. All this is shown, not spread out for show, but expressed in direct terms, seen by an eye which is

not blinded by its own wealth, rendered with rapidity of precision by a careful hand, eager to reach the more important parts of the work. No canvas can make us feel more clearly the enthusiasm which vibrated in Rubens' soul and the confident skill which carried his brush when he was in the mood and his model was beautiful.

When he had this sereneness and confidence his painting becomes lyric, and he seems to be aroused by the vigour of his own imagination. As the subject fitted that treatment Rubens had no fear of handling the good Magi with too much familiarity. They are placid Flemings playing an epic masquerade, and underneath the warlike disguises the honest figures show with hot faces and thick hair. At Brussels and Malines, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar were reverent, attentive, moved; here they are posing for the spectator, amused by their rôles and pleased with their gorgeous accoutrements. Except for the European kneeling in stupid ecstasy whose eyes smile tenderly at the newborn Child, they are simply preening themselves, and their poses would be inexplicable if they did not so entirely command our admiration. The African, belted into his splendid green robe, hand on thigh, stands planted solidly on his spread legs, with his suspicious look and eyes rolled white in his turbaned face. The Asiatic is

fierce in his great red mantle, and holds out the golden cup with a heroic, furious air. Joseph, retiring and timid, is naturally shy before such extraordinary visitors, while the mother feels only a peaceful satisfaction in showing her newborn son. The Child is, as always, full of gracious charm. A Brussels his attention is attracted by the nice bald head of one of the Magi, and he puts his hand naturally out onto the shining thing. The old man is moved to tears, and the good negro laughs with all his teeth. At Malines the Child hugs the gold pieces that have been given him without paying further attention to the people present. At Antwerp the baby, like us, is enchanted by the wonderful spectacle. He throws himself back, laughs and applauds with all the power of his little arms.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEDICI GALLERY

A GREATER undertaking, however, was yet needed to show the full measure of Rubens' genius. His imagination was productive and powerful enough to give life to a universe. Already on March 29, 1620, he had agreed to paint thirty-nine pictures in sizes from 2 metres 10 to 2 metres 80 for the large church which the Jesuits had just built in Antwerp. The conditions of this contract, in which he had promised to deliver the pictures before the end of the year, made it necessary for him to supervise the work rather than execute it himself. "He was pledged to make the small drawings with his own hand and to have the large pictures painted by Van Dyck and certain others of his pupils," and promised on his honour "to finish himself anything that he found incomplete." Almost all of these pictures were destroyed by fire in 1718.[1]

[1] Two have been preserved, *The Miracles of St. Francis Xavier* and of *St. Ignatius.*

CORONATION OF MARIE DE MÉDICIS

Painted for the Medici Gallery, the Louvre (between 1622 and 1625)

Another series quite as important and executed with more personality and less haste is fortunately preserved in the *History of the Life of Marie de Médicis*, now in the Museum of the Louvre.

Marie de Médicis, queen mother of Florence, was now reconciled to her son Louis XIII, and being established again in her lovely Palace of the Luxembourg, had decided to complete its decoration. There were still two long galleries to be painted. What artist could best accomplish such a work? The Fontainebleau school vegetated, mediocre and unproductive. Vouet was in Italy; Poussin, still unknown, was about to follow him. By good fortune the order escaped the hands of the Romans and Bolognese, skillful and dull masters of a worn-out art. The fame of the great painter of Antwerp, and also the patronage of the Archduchess Isabella, who was a friend of Marie de Médicis, caused the choice to fall on Rubens, who hastened to Paris to find out the Queen's wishes and to see the galleries. In one gallery twenty-two canvases at least six metres long and three wide were to glorify the life of Marie de Médicis from her birth to her recent reconciliation with her son, the king. Besides this the painter had to illustrate in the second gallery the life of Henri IV. This was not a task to dismay Rubens. "No undertaking, however great in size

and diversity of subject, has ever crushed my courage."[1]

The episodes to be treated were agreed upon. Rubens returned to Antwerp and started at once to transpose in epic style the adventures of the Queen of France.

His sketches were soon made, slight, clear paintings, already full of inspiration and a direct expression of Rubens' thought. The scheme was satisfactory, with a few modifications, and work in the atelier commenced. The master composed the pictures, painted the principal figures, and harmonised the work of his pupils. His brush, generous, rapid, and a little soft, is easily recognisable among the more painstaking landscapes and accessories, such as the animals of Snyders, painted with more scrupulous detail. His flesh tints and his faces, with alert eyes, seem even more luminous and fresh in the silver-grey atmosphere so dear to van Thulden.

In May, 1623, several canvases were finished and Rubens took them to Paris to satisfy the impatient curiosity of the Queen. They were found "most successful," and the painter was urged, early in 1625, to complete the series at any cost. Rubens hurried back, finished the *Coronation of the Queen*

[1] Rubens to William Trumbull, September 13, 1621.

on the spot, and composed the *Prosperity of the Regency*. The 8th of May, 1625, was to be a great occasion at the Court, the marriage of Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII, to Charles I of England, and it was for this ceremony that the Queen wanted her gallery finished. The pictures were in their places, brilliant with life and beauty.

How did Rubens plan this work, and how did he execute it?

For the first time he had to represent contemporary history. Until now he had created only mythological scenes, or events far enough in the past to allow to the imagination the full liberty of fiction. This time his subject was both historical and contemporary. Must Rubens now give up his poetry, throw away his personality and sacrifice his imagination for the sake of accuracy? Is an artist able to give up his temperament? Face to face with his subject, Rubens never asked for a moment how he should tell history, but how he could transpose it. This was the more necessary as the facts offered only poor and unimposing material.

Marie de Médicis, a fat Italian, past her prime, "la grosse banquière," had behind her a life in which nothing had happened that was worthy of admiration, or even of pity. Born in a family of bankers, married for her fortune by a king in need

of money, she had passed her life in quarrelling with a husband who did not love her, and in war with a son who hated her, and in a regency without glory for herself or profit for the country—a disturbed but empty life, a series of turbulent passions without dignity. When Rubens had eliminated all that could not be told, nothing remained but two births (the Queen's and that of Louis XIII), two marriages (that of the Queen and of Anne of Austria), three transfers of power (Henri to Marie, France to the Regent and the Regent to Louis XIII). It was necessary to paint the reconciliation of the mother and son three times; to repeat three times the happiness of the Regency, and to sketch the Queen's marriage with four scenes (the portrait, the marriage at Florence by proxy, the Landing at Marseilles, and the marriage at Lyons), to put in several dull incidents (Education of the Queen, Signing of the Peace), and some sad ones (the affair of Pont-de-ce, the Flight from Blois). Rubens found in Henri IV's life "material enough, full and varied, for more than ten galleries," but in that of Marie de Médicis, both the exigencies of the subject and the method of the painter demanded that he should find something in his fervid rhetoric to enliven the dreary, spiritless language of the truth.

The most necessary things for the garnishing of

THE BIRTH OF LOUIS XIII

Painted for the Medici Gallery, the Louvre (between 1622 and 1625)

his canvases were beautiful nudes in floating draperies, so he could not do without mythological and allegorical figures. Nothing could be easier to the imagination of a humanist than the personification of ideas, and minds still boiling from the fire of the Renaissance mixed Olympus as naturally with their emotions as the romantic soul brings nature into all human joys and sorrows. To dress Marie de Médicis as Pallas or Juno and surround her with goddesses, Fecundity, Peace, Power, to make her crush the monsters, Envy, Pride, and Tumult, was to put into painting the poetic language of the day.

As Malherbe says

> Sans fard et sans flatterie,
> C'est Pallas que cette Marie
> Par qui nous sommes gouvernés

in an ode to Marie de Médicis, in which we meet Furies, Peace, Justice, Victory, the Tritons, all the personages of Rubens' gallery. Racan describes the Regency in the same style:

> Déjà la Discorde enragée
> Sortait des gouffres de l'enfer,
> Déjà la France ravagée
> Revoyait les siècles de fer.
> Et déjà toutes les furies
> Renouvelant leurs barbaries

Rendaient les vices triomphants
Par une impiété si noire
Que la nuit même n'eût pu croire
Avoir produit de tels enfants.[1]

Does not this read like a description of the picture in which Apollo chases the infernal deities? Later in the same poem Louis XIII conducts the Ship of France, a metaphor used by Rubens, and as in the painting, the glory of Henri IV is expressed by an ascent to the stars.

It is certain that this mythology has not lost as much of its plastic charm for our eyes, as it has of the poetic one which it held for the minds of that time. These pagan gods and goddesses not only delight our sight with their beauty, but also suggest to our minds ideas which without them could not be expressed. To give the exuberant joy of a celebration, the hoarse enthusiasm of a town acclaiming its queen, nereids gaily beat the waves and twist their supple bodies or tritons with puffed cheeks blow conch shells with all their force. The commonplace idea of the happiness of the Regency brought into existence exquisite forms with luminous pearl-like flesh, glowing with life both human and divine. In their Olympian atmosphere these active

[1] Verses for the marriage of Anne of Austria.

genial gods of Rubens give to the reign of Marie de Médicis a quality that is most majestic, most hyperbolic and also most false. This is undoubtedly true, but under the circumstances panegyric was necessary and sincerity optional. Rubens developed his theme and enlarged his subject without being its dupe. In that charming fresh picture where Marie de Médicis holds the balance surrounded by loves and nymphs, down in the corner where the signature should be, a satyr sticks his tongue out at us and with a cynical laugh seems to tell us not to take all this fine display too seriously.

Historical accuracy was not sacrificed, and the Queen was still the central figure around which everything turned. From two sketches made from life in Paris, one profile and one almost full face, honest documents which show delicate features in a pasty face, Rubens was able to give the necessary likeness to a portrait which Marie de Médicis would recognise with satisfaction. Royal and full of pride at the ceremonies of her marriage and coronation, she is also charming in the widow's mourning which shows off her blonde colouring even better, but it is as a mother that she is most touching, and it is impossible to forget her relaxed pose and weary yet happy face after the birth of Louis XIII. She always appears smiling, and her slightly heavy tran-

quillity contrasts with the excitement of the men and gods eager to serve her. Henri IV is always excellent. His Gascon mask and keen look, with grey beard brushed forward and bristling moustaches under the twisted nose, rejoiced Rubens' brush. With an expressive gesture he finds the portrait of Marie charming, and not constrained in the least by his rôle of Jupiter he mounts the Olympian eagle without any ceremony and ends by gaily scaling heaven, "gaillard" even in his apotheosis.

Rubens has given his courtier soldiers fine poses and an air of elegance that is at the same time brusque, mingling the grace of the court with the picturesqueness of the camp. Their hair hangs in graceful curls over lace collars, but their moustaches bristle fiercely, and threatening rapiers break the rich folds of their cloaks. The ladies, with faces framed in delicate ruffs, advance slowly and haughtily, and the long robes with trains of white satin, which drag after them, prolong the rhythm of their tranquil march.

And as if there were not enough men and heroes and gods to fill the history of Marie de Médicis, Rubens has brought in all those animals, horses and dogs, serpents, fish, lions, and allegorical monsters which he learnt to paint in that studio at Wapper, from which he sent out so many hunting scenes.

Among all this he has put his usual settings, porticos open to the sky, church or palatial architecture, lifted curtains, oriental carpets, fields and fortresses, for his realistic imagination always sets the scene in a landscape and never transports us to the clouds except upon Olympus. Here and there in an empty space are allegorical accessories—horns of plenty, flowers, fruits, breastplates, shields, morions, arquebuses, till the gallery seems to contain the whole of Rubens' world.

As to light and colour, he seems to have made here a résumé of all the effects that he loved best. Except for one or two canvases where a sombre tone was obligatory, the whole gallery is bathed in light. The darks, even, are not absence of light, empty places for the eye, nor do shadows gather on edges and in corners to give value to the brilliance which they survived; they are living, beautiful touches on steel or silk which give play to reflections. In the even light Rubens has given the simple colours their full intensity, especially the yellows and reds. As usual he is less free with the greens and violets, but blue, which he never likes, had to be used often because it is the colour of France. The coronation of the queen forced it upon him, and the elegant Minerva, who symbolises France, an equivocal personage with the grace of a woman and the air of a vigorous

youth, drags after her each time she appears a blue mantle sprinkled with gold fleurs-de-lis. Rubens warmed and deepened this blue and darkened it as much as possible to give it body. It is the only colour which he seldom uses light. Red, on the contrary, pleased him. He liked the colour which, even when pure and clear, is not inharmonious and he used it frankly, without any relief but one or two dark shadows in the heavy folds, not weakening it by half tones or shades in the reflections, and on each canvas, from some mantle or drapery, this intense vermilion rings out among the other colours. His beautiful yellows are quite different, iridescent, smooth, violet in their shadows, and barred with golden light on their shining folds. The reappearance of these dominants in all the pictures of the gallery gives unity to this vast decoration, and there is no monotony in the sense of one parentage and one palette for the whole.

All these personages, in such varied attitudes, move in the same scale, sometimes against sombre backgrounds which throw out the flesh tints, but more often set in delicate tones, which make an atmosphere about them. Strong, frank colours, on a sustained grey, oppose the solidity of material objects against the limpid air. Rubens used this background more and more, and the woof against

THE LANDING OF MARIE DE MÉDICIS AT MARSEILLES

A sketch of the painting in the Medici Gallery. Old Pinakothek, Munich (between 1622 and 1625)

which he made his carnations glow best was grey, from satiny slate to silver white melting into reflections of rose and blue. These delicate modulations surround with silence the sharp or delicate notes of draperies and flesh tints. But when Rubens takes us into the world of the gods the golden air becomes an iridescent twilight, and in the heaven of an apotheosis where Olympian felicity reigns the bodies are radiant, the blood is less red, the flesh less warm, and all life is penetrated by light.

Of course there is not in the Médici gallery that intimacy, that depth of confidence that an artist can put into his more moving masterpieces. This is decorative painting for which nothing else could be asked, and yet look at it: majestic queens, haughty ladies, gallant cavaliers, iridescent silks and hangings and armour; a great court fête and all the pomp and ceremony of Catholic worship, gay smiling nymphs, white supple nereids and leaping tritons, all the serene and idle happiness of Olympus; a heroic humanity placed between heaven and earth, where men and gods mingle, equal in life and beauty, and under all this splendour a half-seen world of dark and hideous monsters, the revolt of vanquished ugliness. Such is the worthy setting for royal fêtes which the painter had known how to find in the life of the queen, and if one is sometimes chilled by the

falsity of all this happiness, it is impossible not to enjoy the play of the spectacle.

The *Assumption*, the *Magi of Antwerp* and the Médici gallery mark the end of a generous period, one stage in the development of a genius. Rubens' hand had reached such skill, and his imagination had so familiarised itself with great spectacles, that all these historical scenes have the quality of a dream of the painter and express above all else the triumphant enthusiasm of his spirit. But just at this moment a cruel and unexpected sorrow drove him from his atelier and interrupted his work for four years.

ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN
Antwerp Cathedral (completed in 1626)

PART THIRD

(1626–1640)

CHAPTER I

RUBENS AS AMBASSADOR

In 1626 Isabella Brandt died suddenly. The painter's grief was so great that for a long time it changed all his habits of life and checked his work. He had not the courage for stoic impassiveness. "It seems to me right that such a loss should be deeply felt, and as the only remedy for all sorrows is the forgetfulness that comes with time, I must wait for that for my help; but it will be very difficult to separate the sorrow of this loss from the memory of the person whom I shall respect and honour as long as I live. I think that a journey is the only thing to relieve me from the sight of so many objects which necessarily renew my grief, for she only filled the house—now so empty. She only rested beside me on my deserted couch, but the new sights which a journey offers occupy the imagination and furnish no food for these regrets, now continually renewed. But even when I travel it is

myself that I take always with me."[1] The desire for change was aroused in Rubens, and circumstances helped him to gratify it. For several years his energy was turned in a new direction. He filled the post of ambassador. The events of his life are connected with the history of his country, and his pictures are few and less important.

Rubens had never ceased to be interested in the politics of Europe, and his correspondence shows with what care he kept himself informed through his friends of all that happened in France. When he went to the court of Marie de Médicis to arrange the pictures in the Gallery of the Luxembourg, the Archduchess Isabella had secretly charged him to find out the feeling of France in regard to a reconciliation between the United Provinces and the Low Countries. He made friends with Buckingham in Paris, and kept up his relations with the English Minister and his chargé d'affaires, the painter Gerbier. At this moment Buckingham was making trouble between France and England, and an understanding with Spain seemed to him useful. The ruler of the Low Countries, on her side, wanted peace with England. She chose Rubens to carry on these negotiations, because of her confidence in

[1] Letter to Dupuy, July 15, 1626.

his ability and his love of peace. The King of Spain thought her choice of an ambassador a great mistake: "A man of such a mediocre position" to present "a proposition of such gravity" was enough to cast discredit on the kingdom. But was not Gerbier also a painter? And this was no affair of plenipotentiaries. These were secret agents who could be disavowed if necessary, and who could not conduct their negotiations openly, for Richelieu had gone forward and already had secured the signature of Spain to an offensive treaty against England. The Escurial itself must have found it embarrassing to follow Rubens' amicable proposals, so the plan of a treaty, worked out with great mystery at Utrecht between Rubens and Gerbier, failed for the moment, and Richelieu preserved the alliance with Spain against England long enough to take La Rochelle. But after this defeat the English redoubled their preparations and seemed ready to make even more concessions to secure the alliance of Spain. The King of Spain, Philip IV, understood on his side the advantages of this connection. He called Rubens to Madrid to take up again the negotiations which had dropped, and the painter-ambassador once more left Antwerp.

Rubens' departure had to seem merely a professional matter. He carried some pictures with

him, and at Madrid painted any portraits that were ordered. "Here, as always, I am painting and have already made an equestrian portrait of his Majesty, who has expressed his approbation and satisfaction. As I am living in the palace he comes to see me almost every day. I have also painted at my leisure portraits of all the members of the royal family who have graciously posed for me, to fill the order of my mistress, the Most Serene Infanta."[1] It is certain that between the long delays of Spanish diplomacy there were many hours useless for business which Rubens dedicated to his art. Philip IV, the Queen, Olivares and the princes, were painted. The Titians collected by Philip II were copied by the Fleming. He met Velazquez, who at twenty-nine, had already begun his brilliant career. Rubens spent more than six months at the Court of Madrid, petted by Philip IV and his Ministers, and overwhelmed with orders.

The diplomatic questions remained unsettled. Buckingham was assassinated, La Rochelle was taken and England, exhausted, hesitated between the proposals of Spain and those of France, between Richelieu and Olivares. Rubens was well fitted to continue what he had begun. He was sent to London.

[1] To Peiresc, Dec. 2, 1628.

But first to increase the prestige of her ambassador, Isabella gave him letters patent for "the office of Secretary of her Privy Council, with a reversion of the title to his eldest son." Rubens left Madrid on April 29, 1629. He passed through Paris, where he visited the Palace of the Luxembourg, Brussels where he saw the archduchess, and Antwerp where for a few days he had the pleasure of his own home. When he reached London, early in August, his mood was depressed. "Travelling interests him less now that he is tired. His strength is failing, and from all this fatigue he is deriving no profit but that of dying a little wiser."[1]

But Rubens could not help being flattered by his reception in England. Charles I, who had already insisted on the painter's sending him a portrait of himself, declared his pleasure in the mission "not only because of the proposals which the ambassador brought, but also because of the desire he had felt to know a man of such talent."[2] The diplomat had, it is true, less success than the man. Four months before Rubens arrived an agent of Richelieu had passed through, and England had signed a treaty of alliance with France (April 24). But what difference did that make? One does not break off

[1] Gerbier to Cottington, Feb. 17, 1630.

[2] Cottington to Don Carlos Colonna, May 22, 1629.

negotiations with an artist whom one is so pleased to receive, and Charles I at least promised, "on his royal faith," not to make a league with France against Spain. But although fêted everywhere, Rubens was restless and eager to leave. He waited impatiently for the plenipotentiary that Olivares was sending to sign the treaty. "The Sieur Rubens has taken leave of the king and queen and is ready to depart in three or four days, in spite of the general desire to see him remain, for many reasons." Whether addressed to the ambassador, the painter or the man, these regrets do Rubens honour. He left London loaded with honours and presents and important orders for the decoration of Whitehall. This work was finished in 1635, but he did not go himself to put it in place "because he had a horror of courts."

On his return he received the reward of his zeal and intelligence. Charles I had given him knighthood. The archduchess wished him to have the same title of Chevalier in Flanders. The Council of Madrid remembered that Charles V had made Titian Chevalier de St. Jacques, so Philip IV secured the honour for his favourite painter. "He having," said the prince, "honourably and usefully acquitted himself of his duty to our entire satisfaction, showing zeal, adroitness and ability." Rubens now at the

height of "favour with the Most Serene Infanta and the most important ministers of the King." But he did not want to leave his home. Before retiring definitely to private life, however, he undertook two more diplomatic missions.

When Marie de Médicis, in flight after the Journée des Dupes, took refuge in the Spanish Low Countries, it was naturally Rubens who received her. He took her part in the quarrel, and asked help from the Court of Spain for the fugitive queen and her second son, the Duke of Orleans. Olivares would make no promises, and the queen got nothing from the Low Countries but Rubens' welcome. This complete rupture between the queen-mother and the Court of France had one unfortunate result. It prevented Rubens from finishing the Gallery of Henri IV.

In 1630 the United Provinces started an active campaign against the Spanish Low Countries. The archduchess tried at once to renew the truce, and it was again Rubens whom she sent to negotiate with the Prince of Orange. This last mission brought the painter-ambassador only worry and disillusion. The result was practically nothing, and he had to submit to the arrogance of a noble ambassador, the Duke of Aerschot. This was really the end. Rubens, now fifty-five years old, did not take another moment of his life from his family and his painting.

The Chevalier Rubens, intimate friend of archdukes, fêted by the kings of Europe and their ministers, felt each day a stronger desire for work and repose of spirit. "I profited," he writes, "by a little secret mission at Brussels, to throw myself at her Highness' feet and to pray her as the reward of all my trouble, to discharge me in future from all such missions, and to grant that in future I only serve her in my own home. But I had more difficulty in obtaining this grace than I ever had for any other favour, and it was only on condition of continuing certain secret services which I can do with less inconvenience to myself."[1]

Now that he is again settled and happy in the good city of Antwerp, and feels in himself the warmth and life of a second youth, he defends his work against anything that might distract him from it for a moment. Again the events of his life are pictures.

[1] To Peiresc, Dec. 18, 1636.

CHAPTER II

THE LYRIC QUALITY OF RUBENS

One thing is true of all great artists who have had a long period of production, and whose facility of execution and power of work has not lessened. The longer we study them, and the more our minds follow the development of their genius, the more we find beautiful, profound and touching that work of the end of their lives which has seemed the most incomprehensible to our intelligence and rather isolated by its singularity. This is the period when the artist, sure of his means, goes straight to the point, making no concessions to fashion or to the tastes which he might offend.

It is thus with Titian, Rembrandt, Beethoven and Victor Hugo, and also with the older Rubens, as always more tender, more spiritual, more delicate, he lets us see even further into the heaven of his genius. Through these last ten years it is noticeable that between the large paintings which were ordered there are many pictures which seem more personal

in their inspiration. The portrait of a friend, a familiar landscape, a brilliant fancy, quantities of work of less importance, but always the faithful expression of the mood of the moment, the confidences of a soul.

Rubens' emotions impressed themselves more than ever on his work. In his earlier pictures he had fitted his effects to the idea which he wished to express, and his method adapted itself to the variety of the subjects. But little by little one chord became dominant, that which expressed his affection, his grateful yielding to the forces which until now had given him a full and happy life. Through this period, no matter what the subject he is treating, there is always joy in it, a feast to the eye in harmony with the happiness of his mind. Now that his hand has greater skill than ever before and his eye a correctness which takes all effort from the work; as soon as an idea is born, sensibility riots and works of art blossom vibrating with life. Purely literary criticism would say that having been more oratorical and more descriptive, Rubens had become more lyric; after having striven to astonish the world by the splendours of his imagination, he now, without troubling about the feelings which he aroused, allowed the light of his inner genius to shine out with all its intimate purity.

The first consequence of this was an increased lack of care in his compositions; I mean by that the equilibrium produced by a skillful arrangement of figures. The difference is marked between the *Descent from the Cross* or even the *Assumption* and the *Way of the Cross* at Brussels. The latter picture is much more spontaneous. It has been less planned, or rather, the work has been realised at the same time that it is being thought out. Rubens attacks with a boldness that is always happy, knowing well that he will not be stopped by lack of breath, and that he will find the material which he wants as he goes along. Each episode of that great canvas has the vehemence of an inspiration, two or three figures are sometimes sufficient to fill a vast space with their superb poses, *Christ Menacing the World* at Brussels, *Death of the Magdalen* at Lille. In this last composition there are no more balanced groupings, no more symmetrical architecture, few geometrical lines; instead there is landscape with its unlooked for fancies and its irregularity, the sky covered with clouds and crossed by a flight of archangels. "There are lines which are monsters," Delacroix says, "straight lines, regular serpentines, even two parallels." Bit by bit the hand of Rubens seemed to lose its calm, sometimes carried away by tumultuous visions, by turns observant and

caressing, obeying only the feeling of his heart. This was the way that Delacroix dreamed of painting, and would have painted had he had more certainty in his execution, less contortion in his force; if he had given years of conscientious study to reality before abandoning himself to passionate lyricism.

The sketches show with what increasing ease Rubens expressed a body in action. The rapid execution of even a first study proves that the idea was born complete, ready for realisation without a moment's hesitation or effort. With a few strokes of the brush flesh glows and action appears. At the same time a background quickly rubbed in opposes to the figures a grey well adapted to the amount of warmth or light which they need. A composition may be enriched, strengthened, given more balance or accent, but the effects of light do not change or the general colouring. The idea is never expressed by a drawing of contour or outline. Line was too unreal for the concrete art. Even in the drawings the stroke of the crayon is heavy and red chalk is used in the modelling. Rubens rendered directly the difference of illumination which brings out the relief, but in drawing he preferred the touch of the brush which models with light, to the line which disengages the flat figures from the background. His forms detach themselves clearly from all vagueness,

and spring at once into reality and their proper values. "His greatest quality, if it is possible to rank one above the others, is this extraordinary impetus, this prodigious life. Without this quality there can be no great artist. Titian and Veronese are shallow beside him."[1]

It is true that in their different parts these figures often lack distinction, grace and nervous alertness. Notice the hands, which Rubens almost always paints soft, round and rather commonplace. But then again look at an entire body or a torso; it is unique, perfect, firm and yet supple and articulated. What other painter has rendered as he does the inclination of a bent-over body, the rounded thrust of a thigh, the shoulder of an arm in motion? He preferred unusual positions and violent motions, strange curves, and the stretching of elastic flesh which has weight and substance. "I like his emphasis, I like his figures, overstrained or relaxed."[2] But never in any body in action do you feel the heavy, fixed pose of the model. In a brief synthesis, his eye has seen the essential movement, realised quickly the muscular contractions, and has given to the figure the vigour and lightness and fire of life.

[1] Delacroix. Journal, Oct. 21, 1860.
[2] Delacroix. Journal, March 6, 1847.

His painting grows more and more full of light. He had long ago renounced the manner of Caravaggio and given up the opaque shadows dear to the lovers of bold relief. Even when a shadow is sharply accented there is always reflected colour to give it luminosity, a touch of vermilion in a crease of flesh, a clear violet in the fold of a yellow dress. All these suggestions of light lift the object, make air move around it, and prevent its sinking into the background, and if it is under an open sky, give it all the reflections of full day. Rubens no longer used the contrast of luminous flesh tints with opaque darkness, neither did he commit the absurdity of putting studio effects out of doors. His shadows are no longer heavy things, but light and full of air with the fluidity of atmosphere, and it was this transformation that led him to discoveries which began a revolution in the art of painting.

Much of the quality of Correggio lies in a soft melting of the contours, which smoothed the passage of light into shadow and took all hardness from their opposition. The colouring of Titian or Giorgione owed its invincible charm to the balance between light and dark, and to the skillful harmony which drew all the colours together by a common quality. The medium is strong and thick and the

colours are on the same key, very warm and vibrant, of equal power of content. Rubens' painting is freer, more detached and spread out and seldom unified by a solid undertone. He gets what he wants with little effort, by a hurried rubbing in of grey or bitumen on which the spots of colour flicker, gay, capricious, often without mingling. This colour amuses and refreshes the eye. After looking long at Rubens, Titian seems for the moment solid and heavy, and Veronese flat and without atmosphere.

All art with Rubens is reduced to a play of colour in diaphanous air. The few shadows are volatile and translucent. In this light vapour, flesh tints and draperies throw back gay reflections and blonde skins bathed in the warm air have never, with all their freshness, the polished surface of porcelains. The delicate colour keeps its sweetness and its resonance and the mother-of-pearl of a throat or a thigh gleams softly through the glow which warms it. In proportion as Rubens uses half tones and broken tints the brilliancy of clear colour is less necessary and less frequent. With a more limited range he obtains greater riches. The triumphant red and sumptuous yellow grow paler and die in lovely modulations of grey and rose colour, and in this brightness all sorts of blacks can play their parts

without being absorbed into the shadow. The simplicity of this method astonished Fromentin. There is nothing here of the complicated construction and subtilities of Delacroix. It is a vigorous and healthy pleasure which Rubens offers us, and his principal skill consists in not overworking his colours and preserving, as de Piles says, "their virginity to these colours which he used with a free hand, not disturbing them too much by mixing, for fear that being corrupted they would lose some of their brilliancy and the truth which they had made appear in the painting from the first day that the work began."

CHAPTER III

HELENA FOURMENT

A LETTER written by Rubens to his friend Peiresc four years after his marriage explains his motives. "I had made up my mind to marry again, not thinking myself yet old enough for celibacy, and as after long abstinence legitimate joys are sweet, I chose a young wife from an honest, middle-class family, although everyone urged me to settle at court. But I feared there that evil of pride, which usually, particularly among women, belongs to noble birth. Also I preferred someone who would not blush when I took up my brush, and to tell the truth, it seemed hard to me to exchange the precious treasure of my liberty for the caresses of an old woman."[1] Far from being an old woman, Helena Fourment was almost a child. She was just sixteen and Rubens fifty-three. He had known her long, had watched her grow up, and had already painted her in his

[1] To Peiresc, Dec. 18, 1634.

Education of the Virgin (Museum at Antwerp), where she looks graceful and charming in a pretty, grey dress with glossy folds showing a figure already rounded. A Fourment, one of Helena's brothers, had married a sister of Isabella Brandt, and the two families celebrated the marriage on December 6, 1630, at the Church of St. Jacques, without bans, because Rubens was impatient and would not wait until the end of Advent (*cum dispensatione proclamationis et temporis clausi*).

Of the young wife's character, mind or tastes we know hardly anything, but of her physique and her warm, blonde beauty there is nothing that we have not been shown. No wife was ever more passionately glorified than Helena Fourment in her husband's works. On the threshold of age, his brow already marred by wrinkles and more than one white hair in his beard, a tender emotion awoke in the heart of Rubens which made his eyes more sensitive to the fresh beauty of young flesh, and added to his masculine and robust nature a fervid devotion and joy of the senses, while Helena, gentle, grateful and amused, flowered sweetly under the warm caress of such a love. Rubens felt that he was beginning life again and never had he been so young. From this time on there was such happiness in his life that he could not refrain from pro-

claiming it. The smiling face of his young wife appears constantly on his canvas, and soon he could paint no face without some resemblance, faint or strong, to the lovely Helena, an evidence, conscious or not, of his ardent admiration. His portraits sufficiently reveal to us the affectionate intimacy of his married life.

We see them first, a few months after the marriage, walking on a clear day in their garden (Pinakothek, Munich). Rubens is happy in doing the honours of his estate; with an affectionate gesture he bends his fine head and with one hand on Helena's arm points to a little Italian pavilion where a table is laid. Helena, in a wide-brimmed hat and short skirt like a coquettish gardener, lingers to smile at us with her wondering, ingenuous face. The trees are in blossom, the garden dotted with flowers glows in the sunlight, the turkeys and peacocks pick up the grain which an old woman throws them, and a dog is frolicking on the path. Men, animals and plants are all gay and smiling in the warmth of this day of sunshine and love. Again Helena is seated in an armchair under a portico, where the wind blows sumptuous curtains around the columns. She is richly dressed in the Flemish fashion, with a black robe opened over a white satin skirt embroidered in gold. Her hair, cut straight across the forehead,

puffs out behind her ears in short curls, framing a face radiant with youth. Large eyes, widely open, surprised and gay, a nose slightly turned up with open nostrils, a little mouth ready to smile, the upper lip well arched, and the lower round and firm. Below this plump face a delicate chin and dimples in the cheeks. Lovely, active health, spiced with mischief and gaiety. Again we see her in outdoor dress, standing in the doorway of her house (Collection of the Baron Alph. de Rothschild). She is going to drive, for a coach with horses hastens to the door, and this time she is dressed in Spanish style, a black dress and violet ribbons, with a cap of velvet on her head and a long veil of crêpe floating behind her. She grew more and more fond of these sombre costumes which threw into relief the brilliancy of her fair colouring and made her skin seem more white and her blood more quick and red in the severe dress of a duenna or a widow.

But this was not all Helena's beauty. She had other hidden charms, and Rubens was too much in love to hesitate to celebrate their beauty. He surprised her one day on the way to her bath, and she yielded to her husband's fancy for painting her as she was (*The Little Fur Coat* at Vienna). She would be quite naked but for the fur mantle thrown across her shoulders, which she holds in place with a charm-

THE LITTLE FUR COAT

Imperial Museum, Vienna (about 1631)

ing motion. The little body is rounded, and each movement shows soft folds of flesh, the legs are a little too fully modelled with rather large kneecaps; but how graceful and charming she is, plump and tender and dimpled. And how loving the eye which followed the line of those soft arms to the supple, lithe hands, the drawing of those plump fingers with pointed, rosy nails. The painting of a lover, a poem of love, frank without subtility, where Rubens, in rendering a bit of delicate flesh wrapped in a dark mantle, has hidden nothing of his sensuous pleasure because it is ennobled by the beauty of his art. This is not the last time that Helena Fourment appears in this way in her husband's pictures. After that day almost all the heroines of mythology had the full charms of the little Fleming. Before this time none of Rubens' nudes had had the indiscreet accuracy of the portraits of Helena, the drawing was always more or less generalised and made impersonal, but here it is the revelation without reserve of a character, and an immediately recognisable human body.

After this manner Helena passed through all the adventures of the women who were too beautiful, in mythology or in the Bible. She is one of those who cannot show themselves without arousing desire, and she shows herself without hesitation. We see her as *Bathsheba Coming from the Bath* (Dresden

Museum). While she luxuriously abandons herself to the care of her maid, she forgets to cover her legs, not reflecting that they are quite sufficient to ruin David with all his wisdom. Just to see that thoughtless young face makes us sure that Uriah's troubles are beginning. Only a little dog seems to be troubled by this risk to the honour of his master and barks at the negro who brings the love message. Again as *Susanna* (Munich) she lets herself be surprised in the bath at the risk of tempting the virtue of the passerby. Two licentious old men are already leaning over the balustrade, and to save her modesty she can only turn her back and show the softest of nudes, and again has no one to protect her but the little dog with his virtuous barking. But Helena risked one day a much more serious adventure. A coarse boor has flung himself upon her, seized her brutally and is throwing her down (Munich). This time it is doubtful if she will escape; the idyll is not in the least mythological, Helena is not a nymph and the gallant is no satyr. We would be tempted to pity her if the mischievous eyes and half smile of the victim were not so reassuring. Helena's troubles are sometimes more distinguished, for there are days when she plays tragedy, as in the rôle of *Dido* (Beistegui Collection). Aeneas has just left her and, desperate,

dressed only in a diadem, her eyes cast up to heaven, she has thrown herself on a couch and is threatening her white bosom with a sword, while a bust of the unfaithful one looks down on all the drama of which he is the cause. If she only does not take her rôle too seriously! Again as *Andromeda in Despair* she is tied to a black rock (Berlin). It was an extraordinary monster who could control himself before such appetising flesh, and who yet did not know that so beautiful a being could not be made for misfortune. What lovely despair! How the sobs shake that delicate breast! How well the plump arms, raised above her head, show the contours of body and hips! A charming pose which Helena was wise to take again when she wanted the shepherd Paris to give her the golden apple.

Rubens did not paint these pictures for his own intimate pleasure alone. It is true that a tradition reported by Michel says that after his death Madame Rubens hesitated to offer some of his pictures for sale, and a special clause in his will gave *The Little Fur Coat* to her. But was not that because the picture was a portrait with no historical transformation? It is certainly not one of the most indiscreet of the nudes painted from Helena. Many others went about the world in which no one could fail to recognise the artist's model.

From the time of his return from Madrid until his death, Rubens was loaded with orders by the King of Spain, Philip IV. The new governor of the Netherlands, Archduke Ferdinand, was entrusted with the sending of these pictures, and here is what he writes in 1639 announcing the departure of a *Judgment of Paris:*

"It is without doubt in the opinion of all painters Rubens' best work. I have accused him of only one fault, on which point he gave me no satisfaction, the extreme nudity of the three goddesses. The artist responded that exactly in that consisted the merit of the picture. The Venus in the middle is a very good portrait of the painter's wife, the most beautiful of all the ladies of Antwerp."

Notwithstanding the austerity of the Cardinal-Archduke, these pagan figures and suggestive nudes pleased the devout and amorous Philip IV. He loved to see on the walls of his palace, even in his own rooms, the mythology of Ovid, warmed and revivified by the full-blooded art of Rubens. And everywhere Helena frolicked joyously in the woods and beside the fountains, and when a satyr appears, even though the horned hunter is driving a flock of white frightened nymphs through the dark foliage, the danger does not disturb her serenity, nor his audacity revolt her soft virtue.

In the *Offering to Venus* (Vienna), while young girls surrounded by garlands of *amoretti* are imploring the goddess, some gay maidens are already in the arms of the eager shepherds, and Helena seems to respond to the hoofed gallant who carries her off only by the ripples of her silver laugh. She is always there in the foreground with shining eyes, distracting and dimpled, as careless and naked as a little animal.

Was it not Helena who inspired those exquisite pictures called *Gardens of Love* (Prado Museum, Collection of Edm. de Rothschild), into which Rubens had seemed to put all the poetry of an elegant and pleasure-loving society? On a hot afternoon in autumn some young ladies are sitting in a park around a Renaissance fountain. With rose colour and pale blue, white satin and black velvet, changing lights on silken folds, the gold of hair, the soft whiteness of a throat, the bend of a neck, the spirited line of an outstretched ankle, all the lovely and fugitive things which charm and amuse the eye in a group of happy people, Rubens has created a theme which Watteau developed in his *Fêtes Galantes*. From all sides little loves come flying, carrying torches and flowers and crowns, all that could disarm the cruelty of a lady love. They push boldly into the groups, working with ardour in the cause

of the lovers. One has installed himself on the knees of a gay, buxom maiden, another softly approaches a dreamer with an arrow traitorously hidden behind his back; another pushes a large, vigorous blonde into the arms of a gallant. The men are charming with their long eyelids and hair in heavy curls. These fops are also soldiers. To-day they make love, whispering their tender speeches, absorbed in pleasing, but they are the same men who to-morrow fling themselves into the battle, eager to kill. But the ladies are even more exquisite in their grace and charm, and in most of them we have some memory of Helena. Helena hoyden, Helena fainting, Helena indifferent, Helena dreaming, Helena with eyes that do not see, absorbed in listening to the voluptuous music awakened in her soul by the caress of the love that just touches her ear.

Nevertheless, this wife, so loved, gave Rubens beautiful children—Clara Joanna, Franz, Isabella Helena, Peter Paul—a whole gentle nest of little loves to enliven his house and his pictures. The artist found a new expression of his love in painting her with a little maternal gravity added to her sweetness, but she is still the same. Look at her playing with her children (Louvre). Under the wide, feathered hat her pretty, interested face and

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

The Prado, Madrid (about 1638)

great, smiling eyes are almost serious with tenderness and her soft hands, grown more long and slender, have the suppleness and enveloping touch of a mother. She is wearing a white linen dress with ample folds, and her full, warm, round throat might recall the charms of a dimpled body, if anyone could fail in respect to such a Madonna. Her children are delicious; one with eager motions, eyes too wide open, and the air of a ferret, the other round and plump and too soft to have any lines. Barely rubbed in with fluid colour, barely touched by a brush quick to render familiar objects, in light tones of tawny gold, grey and blue, with a few touches of black, this unpretentious panel gives us more than a poetic and delicate picture. By all that it holds of affectionate sweetness in the warmth and love of its atmosphere of peace, it shows how at the summit of his career and of a life that had been one long triumph, and almost without struggle, the soul of this great artist found its deepest pleasure and his talent its most beautiful and touching expression in these happy and beloved beings. And when he puts himself in the picture, with what tenderness he watches the young mother guiding the little Clara's first steps (Collection of Adolph de Rothschild). In this large picture a harmony of black and green, intense in colour and yet lightly

handled, all the freshness and joy come from the faces of Helena and her child; he himself is at the side. Age has cast its shadow over his happiness. Beside all this youth in flower his face, a little weary and shadowed with sadness, shows us the gravity of his thoughts; reminds us that his share of life must be short, and that even uninterrupted happiness is no protection against suffering or the weariness of age.

CHAPTER IV

LANDSCAPES

THERE was nothing in the life of Rubens to recall the irregularities or the gilded domesticity of some of the great Italians of the Renaissance. His existence was that of an independent citizen, very rich, and distinguished by his work, and he did not allow fame to interfere with his activity. The only distraction which he needed was rest in the country during the summer months. This has been noted as a Flemish custom by Guichardin. "These men are not ambitious, at least not generally so; many of them having made their profits and honestly gained enough to live on, whether in public service or by the sale of merchandise or otherwise, they give up this work, and in a most praiseworthy manner retire to live in peace, using most of their fortune to make a country estate, to which they are much addicted, and living on the fruits of their land or on their income."[1]

[1] Guichardin, tran. Belleforest, p. 36.

Even in 1627, before all his embassies, Rubens had bought a little property in the district of Ekeren. This was shortly after Isabella's death, to escape from the solitude and sadness of his house in Antwerp. He left his country soon after for several years, and when he returned with increased renown, and made young again by a new love, this little country house did not seem a large enough frame for his happiness.

On May 12, 1635, he bought for ninety-three thousand florins (six hundred thousand francs of to-day) the Seigniory of Steen, a little south of Malines in the district of Ellewyt, a half day's journey from Antwerp. It was a château in Renaissance style, built in the middle of the sixteenth century of red brick, with windows and door trimmings of white stone. Formerly a fortified place, it was surrounded by a moat and defended by a drawbridge, and had preserved its feudal columbier, a square, crenelated tower. The property was large, with cultivated land, farms, woods and a pond. Rubens made important changes in his new home. He undoubtedly arranged an atelier, for his letters prove that during the months passed at Steen he never ceased to work, and even the tranquil country of which he had asked nothing but the joy of repose soon stirred his painter's soul. He had never been limited by the walls of his atelier, for it was

AUTUMN LANDSCAPE, WITH THE CHATEAU OF STEEN

National Gallery, London (about 1636)

in the life and fêtes of village and court that he had found what made living beings of his gods and heroes. Now he discovered the charm which he had not had time before to recognise in the infinite stretch of the plain under a damp sky, in the leaves of a tree waving in the breeze, in the shadows of a thicket over a sunken road, and, naturally, without effort, perhaps in the hours when he was resting from his large compositions, Rubens became a landscape painter.

It was not the first time that he had painted this side of nature, for his hunting scenes had necessarily been placed in country settings, but in these, when the landscape was more than a simple decorative background, it was generally left to the hand of some pupil or friend, as in that gay garden of Eden at The Hague, a landscape by Breughel, in which Rubens has put with his most delicate touch an *Adam and Eve.*

It must be acknowledged that Rubens' own method, developed to produce large decorative paintings, was less fitted to landscape. His liquid colours and large, sweeping touch risked embarrassment and indecision in the rendering of a broken, rocky soil, the sharp corner of a house, the straight line of a fence, or the moving foliage of a group of trees. He painted the velvety green of a meadow, or the chang-

ing grey of the clouds with the same breadth and vigour that he put into human flesh or the folds of drapery. He neither saw nor painted the landscape from the point of view of the Dutch, who accented strongly the contrast between the luminous ethereal atmosphere and the solidity of the earth, treating the sky with a smooth, blended facture and the solid, opaque forms with a sharp, visible touch. Such a method required an exact technique, carefully reasoned, and in spite of his clearly defined principles, Rubens' method allowed a steadily increasing rôle to spontaneity and inspiration, even to caprice and fancy. In spite of the difference of climate and light, the landscapes of the Fleming suggest less the precision of Hobbema and Potter than the breadth and warm solidity with more colour than atmosphere of Titian and Giorgione.

But these landscapes, so simply executed, have great sincerity. Rubens painted the countryside as it stretched out around the Château of Steen, as Guicharden described seeing it from the bell tower in Antwerp: "A pleasing country is around, full of villages, hamlets, farms and lovely gardens." This was not nature sad and wild, majestic and conventional, such as his Flemish contemporaries painted on their return from Italy, com-

posed of rather solid vegetation and blue mountains and horizon. This was the earth which man had made fertile, and which had made him content; it is not a solitude, but a friendly place. The village is near by, and near the village the great city; there are signs everywhere of intelligent work—a church spire, a mill that stands out against the sky; the little bridge of stone or simple boards so frequent in Rubens' landscapes is characteristic of this populous, well-watered plain, crossed by canals and roads. The painter never saw the country without the men and beasts who worked and lived in it. Different kinds of work or play belonged to different persons, or different hours of the day. In the morning mists he saw a birdcatcher in his hiding-place or woodcutters at their task (Louvre). In the summer afternoons it is the field work or milking the cows (Munich); after a storm, under a sky made gay by a rainbow, the work recommences and also the rustic pastorals (Munich, Louvre); at sunset the return to the village of peasants with their carts (Pitti Palace, National Gallery). Sometimes a rosy twilight behind the feudal silhouette of Steen aroused in his imagination a fierce cavalry skirmish of the Middle Ages.

But the humble life of peasants and their animals was not the only thing in these landscapes; there

were also the splendid visions, the rich and varied changes which play between a luminous sky and fresh luxuriant vegetation. Rubens saw only the summer and autumn; he rarely represented the desolation of winter or the violence of a storm, and then only from imagination. There is a snowstorm in one of his pictures, but it is in the distance. The important thing is a group of men warming themselves under a shed in the foreground (Royal Gallery at Windsor). He did occasionally paint stormy clouds, torrents, uprooted trees, but these were in imaginary tempests, concocted to illustrate a scene from the Æneid, or an event as in *Philemon and Baucis*, or intended to punish with violence the sins of men (Vienna).

All these sincere and lovely landscapes tell of summer. When Rubens came down to Steen from Antwerp the bad season was over. Every morning began a warm and happy day. At dawn the delicate spires hardly showed above the mist. Suddenly the sky became blue. The morning wind tore apart the silver fog, and between the clouds of wool that it scattered were revealed a brook, a little bridge, the damp soil, still wrapped in the downy vapours in which they had slept. On the horizon the sun rose dazzling, to drink up all this white moisture. Life had already begun, man and beast

were about their peaceful daily duties. Under the level light the plain stretched its long undulations broken by thickets and brooks, and far away towards Malines, almost on the blue line of the horizon, showed the massive outline of St. Rombaut. In the fields the haystacks rise, the cattle sleep. Brilliant shafts of sunlight pierce even the thick trees, breaking the green-spotted pattern of their foliage, lighting the old willow stumps covered with green shoots and touching with a gleam the beating wings of a duck on the pond, or the angular back of a cow, standing motionless, mirrored in the water. But the green and blue plain begins little by little to grow yellow. Each day the foliage is more brilliant with a splendour of gold and red, and in the deep woods the vivid magic of autumn spreads its glow of orange and vermilion mixed with the tender green of the last leaves, and hides the ground with its russet débris. The sun is low now when the men come back from the fields in the evening. As the women pass with their faggots on their heads, the carts drag slowly along the road in front of us on the horizon below a green sky, and from behind a dark, violet cloud with flaming edges, the sun, which has been hidden for a moment, appears. A crimson sun whose shafts of fire touch with stars the points of light on the earth and spread a golden

dust over the tree-tops and roofs and die before us little by little under the advancing shadow. If that carter does not hasten he will have nothing to light him home but the cold moon which is rising behind us. When Rubens left his Château of Steen to return to Antwerp, there had not been an hour of the day nor an aspect of nature of which he had not felt the tranquil charm or which he had not reproduced in his own manner—broad, rapid and unsubtle.

Was it not this communion with the natural life on this fertile, heavy soil that in a moment of gaiety inspired one of his happiest paintings, the *Kermesse* in the Louvre? Was it not the same inheritance which gave these people their appetite for brutal sensations, and which roused in the soul of the painter a play of delicious fancy and guided the hand under whose delicate and spirited touch these dolts tumble about on the panel? What difference does it make whether Rubens ever saw the scene that he painted or not? What do witnesses count who tell us that there never was a fête near Antwerp to which the people did not go, "only to eat and drink without limit, until at the end all were drunk, for without that there can be no fête here, for the people live like beasts"? No, the painting is neither an exact copy nor an accurate memory.

THE KERMESS

The Louvre (about 1636)

I do not find in it the quality of a document, but the audacity and gaiety of the dream of a painter-poet. Where did he find this winged lyrism, this sovereign joyousness, which ennobles feasting, sluggish digestion, the brutality of drunkenness, the snoring of sleepers, quarrels, stupid bets and tipsy amorousness? From what wild and joyous witches' revel had he borrowed the mad rhythm which lifts all the mass with the same spirit, turning the groups with a unique movement in which each one pulls and is pulled? Where had he seen these malformed, thick-headed boors, the females with hanging cheeks and portly stomachs whirling in this way, amusingly and with the lightness of thick-headed elfs? Where did the poetry come from which changed that straw hair into beautiful pale gold, those wenches' skirts and aprons and those coarse red smocks into a vision of will-o'-the-wisps, in lovely touches of pale lilac, satiny white and light blue? How in that skipping crowd could he see the play of exquisite colours which collect, cross, strike or attract each other and separate like a string of pearls? Is it not the prodigy of his art to rise to its highest flight, when it presses most firmly on earth and to reach the pure ideal while it denies nothing of the matter from which it was made? The heavy sap which fertilises the damp soil and nourishes the thick

vegetation on which feed the bodies of these Flemings, strong to work, hard against fatigue, relaxing sometimes from the daily toil in an orgy of gross sensuality, is surely the same which boiled in Rubens' veins when he became a countryman. It is the original vitality his genius spiritualises and of which he multiplied the power.

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS PICTURES, MARTYRS AND "HOLY CONVERSATIONS"

EVEN in the earlier work of Rubens there had never been a page in which the sadness was not tempered by some ray of heavenly joy, no scene completely desolate and without consolation. A lovely Magdalen gives sweetness and tenderness even to the *Descent from the Cross*. And now, as always, above the brutality of murder the angels come in triumphant glory, bringing reward and resurrection. This joy of soul, which is like an effulgence of the painter's genius, penetrates and dominates more and more his colour and the work of his brush, and produces the strange anomaly of conceptions of such brutality as would revolt our taste and feeling if they were not rendered in a language which grows every day more lucid and more musical. Rubens seemed to meet tragic horror or plunge into triviality without fear, sure that he could always rise above them with a stroke of his wings.

Fromentin has especially noted this characteristic

in the pictures in Brussels, the *Martyrdom of St. Lievin* and the *Way of the Cross*. At first glance the *Martyrdom of St. Lievin* seems a gay and fanciful fête. It is necessary to analyse the action to realise that it is a scene of horrible butchery. The lines and colours have no relation to the pitiful reality, but are part of the glorious dream of the painter. The ruthless executioners, armed with hot pincers, tear and burn the flesh of the holy bishop with gestures which are atrocious in their brutality. But vengeance is about to strike them; the archangels, with their hands full of thunderbolts, hurl themselves from the storm clouds, while engaging little angels are bringing the crown and palm of the blessed. A soldier is fleeing, terrified, his arms thrown up; a horseman has been overturned, and a great white horse is rearing and whinnying against the dark sky. All the actors in this short drama are in attitudes of suffering, cruelty or fear.

Placed beside the *St. Lievin* the *Way of the Cross*, painted at the same period, has much of the same quality. This huge canvas has the swing, the looseness and the lack of form of a sketch. It shows tones which are rather indicated than painted in their values, colours cold, without foundation, and the unbridled boldness of a brush that goes straight to its effect, sure of the result—light, quick painting.

THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

Antwerp Cathedral (1611-1614)

It is a breathless climb up Golgotha; people and soldiers form the escort of the martyr; women cry out, clutching their naked infants; you hear the clink of metal and pennants flapping in the wind; and below the thieves climb, poor wretches, their backs bent pitifully under the brutality of the legionaries. Simon the Cyrenean pushes the cross in a striking pose that one cannot forget; the horsemen are superb in their pride, slender, glittering under their steel cuirass and helmet. The tall lances, the Roman eagles, a rose-coloured banner waving against the tragic sky, where dark clouds let through a few gleams of red. The strong light touches here and there a livid glow; as on the lustrous white haunch of a horse which is disappearing behind the peak. The same epic feeling pushed the whole procession in its march towards sacrifice. Who in this cavalcade and tumult could find God, fallen exhausted under the cross, if the peaceful, tender face of Helena Fourment did not bend over him, a Helena more lovely than ever, blonde and serious in her black-satin dress? The suffering of the Virgin is also well subordinated. Is not this the majestic sadness of a victorious return in the evening after a battle? These sombre symphonies, like the tragic wail of brass instruments sounding for death, awake in us I know not what grave and

uplifted courage. The genius of Rubens gives to this sinister cavalcade his own triumphant heroism.

There is the same joyous translation of an abominable scene in the *Martyrdom of St. Ursula*, that wonderful sketch in the Brussels Museum. It is Rubens at his best. Brutes savagely massacring young girls. The whole picture of a satiny grey, the flesh colours are young and dead, with opalescent freshness and gowns of yellow and blue. Around are great red limbs, sombre reflections from steel and the violent gestures of troopers who are reaping beautiful flowers. As usual an angel is falling from heaven bringing the promised happiness. The light makes this carnage into a delicate fête, full of caressing softness. The same thing is true of the *Rape of the Sabines* (London), the *Massacre of the Innocents* (Munich) and the *Horrors of War* (Pitti), where lovely women of Antwerp, sumptuously dressed and undressed, faint, lament and struggle against soldiers who ravish them and murder their children.

Rubens' art needs to portray movement and make light colours vibrate. It makes no difference whether they are expressions of joy or pain, scenes of carnage or pleasure, provided his rich palette may find opportunity to develop its brilliant and variegated changes on satin, velvet, metal or flesh.

But Rubens does not express himself entirely in this unbridled violence and splendour. There are more peaceful and simple scenes which harmonise with the tender and serious chords of his genius. *The Holy Conversations*, for example; a motive dear to the Primitives, who in their choice of saints, male and female, naïvely showed the manner in which they preferred to express their religious feeling; dear to the Venetians, who were often satisfied with groups of faces, provided they were beautiful; dear to Correggio, the painter of loving attitudes and looks; and finally, dear to Rubens who seems to rest and, as it were, detach himself from the confusion of battles and tortures in the freshness of these religious idylls. Rubens composed the most inspiring of his last works by using several faces, generally those of women, in affectionate positions, with no other thought or action but their quiet tenderness. What other idea but that is there in the *Triptych of St. Ildefonso* in the museum at Vienna? On the return of her embassy the Infanta Isabel had ordered from her painter a large triptych, destined for the high altar of the Brotherhood of St. Ildefonso in the Church of St. Jacques of Candeberg, a parish of the court. Rubens was chosen to honour the memory of the Archduke Albert, founder of the brotherhood. On each one of the

two wings—as in an early canvas by the artist, of the Duke and Duchess of Mantua, his first patrons—Albert and Isabel attended by their respective patron saints are kneeling in a frame of elaborate design and draperies. The nobility of pose and beauty of colour, the dull flashes of red velvet, the delicate shining ermine, the golden sheen on the white satin, all contributed to give this simple scene the majesty of a royal ceremony. And, in fact, does not a queen, in the midst of her court, resemble this Venetian Virgin, who, seated on her throne of shell, is giving a chasuble to the holy Cardinal of Toledo? Does not the beauty of this picture lie in those charming, attentive and smiling young girls and the graceful flight of cupids, which together give this scene its radiant significance, like the trills of a joyous orchestra?

There is also nothing else in the *Coronation of St. Catherine* (in the Duke of Rutland's gallery) but a circle of sweet, pretty faces beneath flying cupids. Just as in the picture of St. Ildefonso and in that of *Thomyris and Cyrus* in the Louvre, the intention of the painter is to show feminine beauty. His ideal has changed a great deal since the time when, on his return from Italy, he painted powerful giants in vigorous poses expressing violent emotions like those which, by their contortions, increase

the horror of the *Elevation of the Cross*. This vigour, borrowed from Michelangelo and Guilio Romano, has been softened. Giants have turned into gay laughing nymphs with sparkling eyes, full rich bodies and eager gestures. And when Helena appeared there was a new transformation. The beings created by Rubens' brush were enchanting in their fair, fresh beauty. Like the little Antwerp girl, they all have ivory skins and innocent souls, the charm of childlike grace and feminine elegance.

It is for this reason that there has been a tendency to recognise Helena Fourment in the picture which adorns the tomb of Rubens at Antwerp (*The Virgin Surrounded by Saints* in the Church of St. Jacques). Romantic biographers have even thought that the artist, at the end of his life, had gathered in this picture his two wives, his father, his youngest son and himself in order to present to the admiring pilgrim who stopped at his grave a summary of his affection and talent. The idea is beautiful and deserves to be true. But there is no proof that this was Rubens' father, and, besides, how could he have forgotten, in this token of his gratitude, his brave old mother, Maria Pypelnickx, whose death had so sadly grieved him on his return to his own country at the very moment when he was to enjoy the fame which he deserved? Nor does one recognise in this

lovely Virgin, of a slightly Venetian type, the pleasant commonplace face of Isabella Brandt, nor in any of those stout little flaxen-haired women the small, thin face filled with large, placid eyes of that Susan Fourment whom he loved, they say, and whom he often painted (*Fur Hat* in the National Gallery and the Louvre). The child is certainly Helena's son, but it was a frequent custom with Rubens to paint his own children. The face of St. George also recalls that of Rubens, a Rubens "old, thin, grey, dishevelled, slightly haggard, but noble with inward fire" (Fromentin), though his "dishevelled" head is not exactly like the slightly bald head of the sexagenarian painter. As for Helena, is she here or not? What difference does it make if it was the remembrance of her beauty which guided his hand in drawing those gentle faces, if the atmosphere of love surrounding her is that which breathes from this frame?

Observe, also, that of all his religious pictures, this was perhaps the only one not painted to order. If he chose this subject, it was because it contained what he wished most to express. When the picture was finished the artist himself directed that it should adorn his tomb, and thus showed that he gave it a special meaning and value. And certainly this meaning is not in doubt. The picture

HELENA FOURMENT AND HER CHILDREN

The Louvre (between 1636 and 1640)

declared that the visions, feelings, the entire inmost soul of this man on the threshold of old age, is, as it were, illuminated by a radiant light, given new life and rejuvenated by a continuous dream of love and beauty. Who is more affected by the innocent purity of a young girl than this conjurer of coarseness and force? The Magdalen—who recalls the charming apparition of Helena in her little fur coat—holds back a black-satin robe with a graceful movement of the hands to expose a round, white shoulder, a rare piece of painting, and, of all those numberless Magdalens created by Rubens, is not this last child of his genius the most tender and appealing, this loving, quiet face full of unsatisfied passion, probably unrepentant, turning her lazy profile and allowing her heavy tresses to fall over her soft, full neck? Nor has Rubens created a Madonna more exquisitely pure than this Virgin bending over her child; he has never painted anything more charmingly sweet and gentle than the glance from beneath her long, lowered eyelids, than the soft shadow cast by her face upon her breast. Is not this little Jesus, with his expressive gestures and bright eyes, the work of a father who is in the habit of watching for the dawning smile on the mouth of his child? Happy little cherubs, languishing young girls, innocently pure, com-

pose this crown of tenderness and goodness, while two important personages, St. Jerome and St. George, in austere and noble attitudes frame the scene.

The picture is priceless, broad, full, sweeping—an expression of rapture and yet studied, careful and rich in contrasts and details. The pigment is richer than ever, the texture fine-grained and firm, and the brush caresses the surfaces with a flying touch which has firmness, audacious tranquillity and force, as calm as it is assured. The colour is exact, but not rare in spite of its correctness; flesh and draperies stripped of their maternal quality play in a vision of enchantment. Around the edges strong and heavy colour, the dark gleam of armour and the warm pallor of a flexible body, a few solid forms to frame and steady this iridescent scene. In the centre flesh tints of pearl, amber, opal, rose and grey; the light is broken, diffused, faint, coloured by reflections deadened on the flesh and revealed on the lustrous surfaces, a rapid play of values, which soon reaches the extreme limit of black and white, but with shades of all possible richness of colour; around these an atmosphere, light and sweet as the tenderness which unites them, an exquisite fête that passes, mingles and reveals all the silvery delicacy of morning light and

the purple splendour and warm gold of the declining day.

I know of no painting filled with emotion more intimate, more affectionate and human. At Venice a patrician art, proud and never abandoning itself to passion; in Florence an artistic culture too self-conscious perhaps to let itself be swept away by emotion. At the back of the Church of St. Jacques, in a little retired chapel where a radiant apparition gleams softly through the shadow, and these beings seem to be whispering their love in the silence, Rubens frankly reveals himself to us. A Latin inscription on the slab, which confers on the painter the title of Apelles for all time, makes one think of the masterpieces in the neighbouring churches of that *Elevation* and *Descent from the Cross* whose seriousness and eloquence had at first sight proclaimed a master, and of those early works so conscientiously correct as to make one doubt if such a beginning could be improved on later. Yet until the end his work went on developing without any falling-off or repetitions; his days passed in triumphant glory. Only at the end of his career a new emotion transformed the artist's life, rejuvenated his art and tempered his energy into transports of love. With two or three fair young heads, with one or two exquisitely attractive nudes with

tumultuous flights of rose-coloured angels, he realised a dream, he created, I know not how, something affecting and disturbing, like a rare flower whose perfume is more penetrating because the sap rises from more profound and hidden depths.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH OF RUBENS

But Rubens' fame had made him too conspicuous for it to be possible for him to keep completely out of public life in the peaceful intimacy of his family. There was an ancient custom in Flanders, when the province received its emperors or archdukes, Charles V or Prince Albert, to offer them as a tribute of welcome an exhibition of its riches and its art, of all that made the glory of its cities. Though much fallen from its former prosperity Antwerp was still, and under the reign of Rubens more than ever, the holy city of sculptors and painters, and when, after the death of Isabella, the King of Spain, Philip IV, sent his brother, the Archduke Ferdinand, to govern the Low Countries, the latter had hardly arrived at Brussels before the magistrates of Antwerp invited him to visit their city. The reception which he received surpassed in splendour any which the people of Antwerp had ever given to anyone.

For months they had worked at constructing

triumphal arches adorned with paintings and statues along the route which the new archduke must follow. All the painters, all the sculptors of Antwerp, all the friends or pupils of Rubens, Cornelis de Vos, Jordaens, Cornelis Schut, van Thulden, Wildens, David Pychaert, Erasmus Luellin, had collaborated. Rubens had given the construction plans —artist's designs of rather heavy richness—drawings for statues and sketches for paintings. With an indefatigable facility he had lavishly produced motives, which his pupils afterwards developed, battles, triumphs, allegorical figures and portraits; his imagination created living crowds of men and gods, and all these beings restrained their movements and framed their attitudes within the lines made by the pediments and façades. The Archduke Ferdinand was filled with admiration. But when he wished to congratulate the author of all these marvels he was told that Rubens was ill, and that the prince must visit the painter at his own house.

Rubens' powers, in fact, were beginning to fail, and bodily weakness and attacks of gout were putting a limit to his activity. Already, during the preparations for this fête, "the entire responsibility of which the magistrates had put upon his shoulders,"[1]

[1] To Peiresc, December 18, 1634.

he had only been able to oversee the numerous workshops by having himself carried about in a chair. The attacks became more and more frequent, and the letters of the archduke to the King of Spain, who impatiently awaited the pictures, show us the painter constantly checked, inactive, ill. June 30, 1638, he wrote: "Rubens will paint all the pictures with his own hand to save time, but he is at this moment much afflicted with the gout." The malady became more serious and painful. January 10, 1640, he wrote: "A new attack of gout has prevented Rubens from working." And on April 5th: "Rubens has been deprived of the use of both hands for more than a month with little hope of again taking up his brushes. He tries to take care of himself, and it is possible with the warmer weather his condition may improve." But he did not improve. This time Rubens was not able to meet his engagements. The pictures expected by the King of Spain were promised for Easter. Then for St. John's Day. They were not finished.

Rubens had no illusions. He felt himself destined to an early death. "Death will soon close my eyes forever."[1] His friend Gerbier wrote to him in vain (May 13th) that "with the approaching

[1] To the sculptor Duguesnoy, April 17, 1640.

fine weather he would get better and better," for this year Rubens was not to enjoy the summer or see his countryside of Steen. But weakened by suffering as he was, he kept the courage of his vigorous years. From a picture in Vienna, and a very beautiful drawing in the Louvre, one can judge to what extent Rubens had aged, how he saw himself. He does not throw on the mirror the fixed scrutiny of a restless, sick man with a crease of concentration between his brows; his eyes are always direct and frankly open, and they are the same with which he had for forty years looked upon the world to give to his dream its glorious effect. The head retained its noble seriousness, with its twisted moustaches and long, curling hair. The man has preserved his masculine coquetry; he has a noble air beneath his wide felt hat, in his cavalierly draped cloak. Although his lips seem drawn by pain, though on his face, momentarily softened, suffering has left its traces, one feels, in spite of his decline, pride muttering as in the verses of Malherbe: "I am conquered by time; I yield to its ravages."

The man who thus disappeared belonged to a generation of indomitable energy, born before the century of discipline, the same which had evolved a new order in the midst of terrible struggles, which

provided European literature with types of heroism and force, which gave to Corneille the model for his "Genereux" and "Bully" (Matamore).

What pride could be more justified than that of the Antwerp master? If he considered how he had played a man's part, he could say honestly that no one of his contemporaries had won a more firmly established or greater fame than he. If he looked back over his past and recalled the names of some of the great men who had touched on his life, if he compared their fates with his present fortune, he could plainly see that even for the most important personages, kings and their ministers, it would have been a glorious title, that of patron of Rubens. Fortune did not favor them. The Duke of Mantua has long since disappeared, and his inheritance is being disputed by force of arms. "Mantone has just been taken by storm, by the Imperial troops who put to death a large part of its inhabitants. He felt great sorrow because he had been for many years in the service of the house of Gonzaga."[1] The Duke of Lerma, dismissed like a lackey by his master, condemned by the law, died a miserable death. His successor, Olivaris, fought in the midst of national calamities and against inevitable disgrace. Spinola died filled with disgust. Buck-

[1] To Peiresc, 1630.

ingham's career ended in his assassination. Marie de Médicis, wandering in exile, came to Antwerp and borrowed money from her painter on her jewels. Charles I of England, to whom his people refused to pay taxes, began a struggle which brought him to the scaffold. Rubens, when he considered these perishable honours, realised the enduring supremacy which he had won. The peace which had been made on his return from Italy, which he himself helped later to maintain, had been again indefinitely broken. War had once more broken out. A little while before his death the artist was able to hear from his own house the roar of cannon during the bloody massacre of Calloo. Flanders had been ravaged once more from north to south. Throughout Europe the struggle, at its decisive moment, had become more violent between Catholics and Protestants, Spaniards and Batavians, Austrians and French. There could be no sadder sight for Rubens. One of his last pictures now in the Pitti Palace symbolised the horrors of war: "This woman in mourning, black-robed, with torn veil, stripped of all her jewels and ornaments, represents unhappy Europe, who for so many years has suffered pillage, outrages and miseries, the results of which are beyond expression."[1]

[1] Rubens to Lusterman, March 12, 1638.

He died at noon on May 30, 1640, from an attack of gout, and his funeral took place on June 2d. All the guilds, the clergy and the religious orders were present. The entire city came to do honour to the greatest of its citizens, to him who had consoled it with his fame in its decline. According to the local custom, the funeral feasts gathered together at his own house, at the city hall, at the hotels, friends, magistrates, members of various brotherhoods. Sums of money were given to the clergy and to the poor in the parishes of St. Jacques at Antwerp and that of Ellewyt. His estate was divided between Helena and Albert and Nicholas, Isabella's two children. His books, collections and pictures were scattered. A sale took place, conducted by three of his pupils, whom Rubens had himself appointed. The King of Spain, the Emperor, the Elector of Bavaria and the King of Poland were represented at it.

From now on the school of Antwerp failed rapidly. Van Dyck, next in greatness to the master, painted no more and soon died. The generation contemporaneous with Rubens, his friends and pupils, could not be replaced as they disappeared. He seems to have been the only source of inspiration; around him there were flashes of genius; very great painters were conspicuous: Jordaens, Snyders, Fyt,

de Vos, Teniers. But there was no one who could continually renew the light, once the star had set. Even the pupils had scattered and deserted the famous school. They had carried to London, Paris, Italy and to the German court the weakened voice of the new doctrine. It was Rubens who, through Van Dyck, taught painting to the English and prepared the way for Reynolds and Gainsborough. In France the Antwerp influence was at first counteracted by the ascendancy of the psychological art of Poussin and Lebrun, but it survived them and created great portrait painters like Largillière and Rigaud. It was to the Médici gallery that our graceful, charming mural painters of the eighteenth century went to study their method. And when the armies of the Republic and Napoleon collected the masterpieces of Flemish art, for a short time in the Louvre, this wealth of colour and life in such contrast to the depressing academic school, inspired more than one of the pupils of Guerin's studio. Delacroix studied Rubens continuously with the dream of renewing his art.

This immense output of work, glowing with eternal youth, scattered among all the museums of Europe, carried on the great lesson of the departed master. To some who regard painting as an abstract language, who sacrifice the pleasure of the senses to

that of the intellect, who express their ideas in an art stripped of its material covering; to those who, following classical expression, seek eloquence by the use of general terms, he showed in *The Adoration of the Magi* in Antwerp what noble enthusiasm a feast of the eyes can give the soul. For others, held spellbound by the unexpected, disorganised and opulent forms of nature, who limit their art to an exact, uncompromising copy, who know that feeling can be expressed without relation to matter, he imagines scenes which are nevertheless true, as in the *Ascent to Calvary* at Brussels and the *Virgin Surrounded by Saints* at Antwerp. Rubens reminds the Idealist that the eye must be sensitive and the hand skillful, the good craftsman that emotion can give life to the cleverest technique. He makes them understand how the careful, conscientious thought of a primitive Fleming can be in harmony with the beautiful buildings and well-balanced lines of the great Italian decorations; how it is possible to touch at one and the same time both extremes of art, the idealistic and the realistic, to imbue matter with coarseness or tenderness, and to introduce a cry of pure passion into a musical phrase without spoiling the harmony.

THE VIRGIN SURROUNDED BY SAINTS
Church of St. Jacques, Antwerp (between 1638 and 1640)

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

DATE	IMPORTANT EVENTS	PRINCIPAL WORKS
1577	June 28. Birth of Rubens at Siegen.	
1578	Return to Cologne.	
1587	Death of Rubens' father. Return to Antwerp. Rubens a page in the service of the Countess de Lalaing.	
1590	Entered the atelier of Tobias Verhaecht, the landscape painter.	
1592	Entered the atelier of van Noort for four years.	
1596	Became the pupil of Otho Venius.	
1598	Is admitted as freemaster into the Guild of St. Luke.	
1600	Started for Italy. Arrived at Venice. Entered the service of the Duke of Mantua.	Drawings.
1601	Visited Rome.	Three pictures for the Church of St. Croce, Jerusalem.
1603	Journey in Spain.	Portraits.
1604	At Mantua.	*The Holy Trinity.* *Transfiguration* (Nancy). Drawings and Copies.
1605	At Rome.	*St. Gregory* and *St. Domitilla* (Grenoble).

DATE	IMPORTANT EVENTS	PRINCIPAL WORKS
1608	Death of Rubens' mother. Return to Antwerp.	
1609	September 23. Painter to the Archduke. October 2. Marriage to Isabella Brandt.	*Portraits of Painter and Isabella Brandt.*
1610	Bought a house on the Wapper.	*Elevation of the Cross* (Antwerp).
1611 to 1618		*Descent from the Cross* (Antwerp). *Jupiter and Callisto* (Cassel). *Battle of the Amazons* (Munich). *Smaller Last Judgment* (Munich). *Perseus and Andromeda* (Berlin). *The Four Quarters of the World* (Vienna). *Hunts* (Dresden, Munich). *Progress of Silenus* (Munich).
1618	Bought the collection of Sir Dudley Carleton	*Miracles of St. Francis Xavier* and of *St. Ignatius Loyola* (Vienna). *St. Ambrose and St. Theodosius* (Vienna). *The Large Last Judgment* (Munich). *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (Malines).
1618		*Last Communion of St. Francis* (Antwerp).

DATE	IMPORTANT EVENTS	PRINCIPAL WORKS
		The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus (Munich).
to		*Le Coup de Lance* (Antwerp).
		The Straw Hat (London).
1620		*The Earl and Countess of Arundel* (Munich).
1621	Commenced to paint the Médici Gallery.	*Médici Gallery* (Louvre).
	Trip to Paris.	*Conversion of St. Bavon* (Ghent).
	Rubens allied himself with Peiresc.	*Calling of St. Roch* (Alost).
		Adoration of the Magi (Antwerp).
1626	Death of Isabella Brandt.	*Assumption of the Virgin* (Antwerp).
1627	Negotiations with Gerbier in the service of Spain.	
1628	At Madrid.	Portraits.
1629	Ambassador to England.	Sketches for Whitehall.
1630	Marriage with Helena Fourment.	Portraits of Helena.
	Rubens demanded that Spain should take up the cause of Marie de Médici.	*The Walk in the Garden* (Munich).
		Triptych of St. Ildefonso (Vienna).
		Offering to Venus (Vienna).
		The Little Fur Coat (Vienna).
1632	Last embassy to the Netherlands.	
1633	Death of the Infanta Isabella, Rubens' patron.	*Thomyris and Cyrus* (Louvre).
1634	Entry of Archduke Ferdinand into Antwerp.	*Martyrdom of St. Lievin* (Brussels).

DATE	IMPORTANT EVENTS	PRINCIPAL WORKS
	Rubens ill with gout.	
1636	Purchase of the Seigneury of Steen.	*The Way of the Cross* (Brussels).
1635		*Massacre of the Innocents* (Munich).
to		*Rape of the Sabines* (London).
1637		Landscapes.
		Helena Fourment and Children (Louvre).
		The Kermesse (Louvre).
		The Garden of Love (Madrid).
1638	Orders from the King of Spain.	*Judgment of Paris* (Louvre).
		Diana and Callisto (Madrid).
to		*The Three Graces* (Madrid).
		The Horrors of War (Pitti).
1640		*The Rest in Egypt* (Madrid).
1640	May 30. Death of Rubens.	*Virgin Surrounded by Saints* (Antwerp).

CATALOGUE OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF RUBENS PRESERVED IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

It is not possible to give here a complete list of all the works of Rubens. The enumeration of fifteen hundred pictures would still leave it incomplete. For a detailed catalogue see the *Œuvres de Rubens* by Max Rooses in five volumes. We will limit ourselves to a list of the pictures which are best known.

The figures which follow the letters W (wood) and C (canvas) indicate first the height and second the width in centimeters of the picture.

GERMANY

BERLIN ROYAL GALLERY

Perseus and Andromeda. W. 99x137 (about 1615).
Neptune and Amphitrite. C. 305x291 (between 1615 and 1618).
St. Cecilia. W. 177x139 (about 1639).
Also: *Raising of Lazarus, St. Sebastian, Diana Hunting a Deer, Andromeda.*

CASSEL. MUSEUM

Jupiter and Callisto. W. 126x184 (1613).
Vic ory Crowning a Hero. W. 174x263 (about 1618).
The Virgin Worshipped by Saints. C. 257x202 (between 1620 and 1625).
Also: *The Flight Into Egypt, Diana at the Chase.*

DRESDEN. Royal Gallery

Boar Hunt. W. 137x168 (about 1615).
Also: *St. Jerome in the Desert, The Drunken Hercules, The Old Woman with the Footstove,* Portraits.

MUNICH. Pinakothek

Rubens and Isabella Brandt. C. 174x132 (1609 to 1610).
Battle of the Amazons. W. 121x165 (1610 to 1612).
Last Judgment. Small, arched panel, 182x120 (about 1615).
Last Judgment. C. 605x474 (1618).
Lion Hunt. C. 247x375 (1618).
The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus. C. 222x209 (1619 or 1620).
Progress of Silenus. W. 205x211 (1618 to 1620).
The Garland of Fruit. W. 117x203 (from 1618 to 1620).
The Earl and Countess of Arundel. C. 261x265 (1620).
The Walk in the Garden. W. 97x131 (1630 or 1631).
Helena Fourment. W. 160x134 (1630 to 1632).
Massacre of the Innocents. W. 198x302 (about 1635).
Susanna and the Elders. W. 77x110 (from 1636 to 1640).
Landscapes.
Also: *The Fall of the Rebel Angels, The Punishment of the Unjust, The Betrayal of Samson, The Defeat of Sennacherib, Jesus and the Four Penitents, Faun and Satyr.* Studies for the Médici Gallery. Portraits and Landscapes.

ENGLAND

LONDON. National Gallery

The Straw Hat. W. 77x53 (about 1620).
Rape of the Sabines. W. 170x235 (about 1635).
Autumn Landscape. W. 135x236 (1636).
Also: *The Triumph of Silenus, The Conversion of St. Bavon* (sketch), *The Triumph of Julius Cæsar* (imitation of Mantegna), *The Judgment of Paris, The Horrors of War* (sketch).

Whitehall

Glorification of James I. A number of canvases on the ceiling (from 1630 to 1635).

A large number of important paintings in private collections.

AUSTRIA

VIENNA. Imperial Museum

St. Ambrose and St. Theodosius. C. 362x246 (about 1618).
The Miracles of St. Francis Xavier. C. 635x395 (1619 or 1620).
The Miracles of St. Ignatius. C. 535x395 (1619 or 1620).
Assumption of the Virgin. W. 458x297 (1620).
The Little Fur Coat. W. 175x96 (after 1630).
Triptych of St. Ildefonso. W. 352x236, wings 352x109 (from 1630 to 1632).
Offering to Venus. C. 217x350 (about 1631).
Also: *Head of Medusa, The Four Quarters of the World, The Child Jesus and St. John.* Portrait of Rubens.

Gallery of Prince Lichtenstein

History of Decius Mus. Eight cartoons for tapestry (1618).
Albert and Nicholas Rubens. W. 158x92 (1625 or 1626).
Also: *Erichtonius in His Basket,* Sketches for the Henri IV Gallery, Portraits.

BELGIUM

ANTWERP. Museum

Christ on the Straw. W. 139x90, wings 137x42 (about 1618).
The Last Communion of St. Francis. Arched panel 420x225 (1619).
Le Coup de Lance. W. 424x310 (1620).
Adoration of the Magi. W. 447x235 (1624).
Education of the Virgin. C. 193x140 (1625).
Also: *The Baptism of Christ, The Trinity, Venus Indifferent, The Virgin with the Parrot, St. Theresa Praying for the Souls in Purgatory, The Chariot of Calloo,* Portraits.

Cathedral

Elevation of the Cross. W. 462x341, wings 462x150 (1610).
Descent from the Cross. W. 420x310, wings 420x150 (from 1611 to 1614).
Assumption. Arched panel 490x325 (finished 1626).

Church of St. Jacques

Virgin Surrounded by Saints. W. 221x195 (between 1638 and 1640).

Church of St. Paul

Flagellation. W. 219x161 (1617).

BRUSSELS. Museum

Adoration of the Magi. C. 375x275 (1615).
Assumption of the Virgin. C. 490x330 (about 1619).
Martyrdom of St. Lievin. C. 450x335 (about 1635).
The Way of the Cross. C. 560x350 (finished in 1637).
Also: *Venus at the Forge of Vulcan*, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, *The Entombment*, *St. Francis Protecting the World*, Sketches and Portraits.

ALOST. Church of St. Roch

St. Roch Praying for the Plague Stricken. Arched panel 390x260 (1623 or 1624).

GHENT. Church of St. Bavon

The Conversion of St. Bavon. Arched panel 471x281 (1624).

MALINES. Church of Notre Dame

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes. W. 301x235 (1618 to 1619).

Church of St. Jean

Adoration of the Magi. W. 318x276 (1619).

SPAIN

MADRID. Museum of the Prado

Adoration of the Magi. C. 346x488 (1610; retouched by Rubens in 1628 to 1629).
Diana and Callisto. C. 202x323 (between 1638 and 1640).
The Three Graces. C. 221x181 (1638 or 1639).
The Garden of Love. C. 198x283 (about 1638).
The Ronda. W. 73x101 (about 1639).
The Rest in Egypt. C. 87x125 (between 1635 and 1640).
Also: *The Twelve Apostles* (sketches for the Triumph of the Eucharist), *The Religious Decree of Rudolph of Hapsburg,* Thirty-four paintings of subjects from the Metamorphosis of Ovid, Portraits.

FRANCE

PARIS. Museum of the Louvre

Twenty-five pictures of the Médici Gallery. C. about 394x295 (from 1622 to 1625).
Lot Leaving Sodom. W. 75x119 (1625).
Adoration of the Magi. C. 280x218 (1627).
Thomyris and Cyrus. C. 263x199 (1632 or 1633).
Kermesse. W. 149x261 (about 1636).
Helena Fourment. W. 113x82 (between 1636 and 1640).
Also: *Christ on the Cross, The Triumph of Religion, Tobit and the Angel,* Landscapes and Portraits.

Collection of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild

Two portraits of Helena Fourment. W. 198x122—W. 203x176 (1633 and 1639).

Collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild

Abundance. (After 1630.)
The Garden of Love. (About 1638.)

LILLE. Museum

Descent from the Cross. W. 425x295 (about 1615).
Also: *Ecstasy of St. Magdalen.*

GRENOBLE. Museum

St. Gregory. C. 474x286 (1608).

NANCY. Museum

Transfiguration. C. 417x675 (from 1604 to 1606).

HOLLAND

AMSTERDAM. Ryks Museum

Helena Fourment. W. 74x56 (between 1630 and 1632).

THE HAGUE. Museum

Adam and Eve. W. 75x135 (in collaboration with Breughel about 1620).

ITALY

FLORENCE. Uffizi

Portraits of Rubens.
Battle of Ivry. C. 394x727 (between 1628 and 1630).
Entry of Henry IV into Paris. C. 394x727 (between 1628 and 1630).
Also: *Venus and Adonis, Isabella Brandt.*

Pitti

The Philosophers. W. 163x138 (1612 to 1614).
The Return from the Fields. W. 122x195 (1637).
The Horrors of War. C. 206x342 (1638).
Also: *Holy Family, St. Francis of Assisi.*

RUSSIA

PETROGRAD. Hermitage

Isabella Brandt. C. 153x77 (about 1625).
Helena Fourment. W. 187x86 (1631 or 1632).
The Mired Cart. W. 87x129 (between 1635 and 1640).
Also: *The Feast of Herod, Christ Before Herod, Perseus and Andromeda.* Sketches, Landscapes and Portraits.

NOTES ON THE DRAWINGS

Rubens had specified in his will that his drawings should not be included in the general sale of his works. They were not to be sold until eighteen years after his death, if none of his sons or sons-in-law should devote himself to painting—the very thing which happened. The sale took place in the year 1659. The celebrated collector, Everard Jabach, acquired a large number of them which came later into the collection of Louis XIV, either directly or after having been in the Collection Coozat. Another important group of Rubens' drawings is to be found in the Albertina collection at Vienna.

They show characteristics differing very much, according to their purposes. Some were done in Italy after the works of the great masters of the Renaissance or the remains of antique statuary. These were drawings of great accuracy. The character changes according to the model (Michelangelo, Raphael, da Vinci or Correggio). His pencil is true, sometimes full of energy, sometimes weak. Rubens scarcely ever improves the contour of a face or hand, an incorrect form or a rather weak outline, by making a fuller curve. These drawings are sometimes tinted with wash. All this is only an aid to his memory. The Fleming, as a good Romanist, was unwilling to return from Italy without bringing back drawings as souvenirs of the Greco-Roman remains and the treasures of the Vatican and Sistine Chapel.

Other drawings were made from Rubens' pictures to serve as models for the engravers. The latter copied more easily a small-sized reproduction where the transposition of tones into values had been determined by the artist himself. These drawings are therefore of great delicacy and finish. They were probably done, for the most part, by his best pupils, and merely retouched by Rubens, who intensified here and there a light or shadow with ink washes or several strokes of white.

But the most interesting of Rubens' drawings are the sketches done rapidly from nature, a body in motion, a portrait, an animal, a tree trunk, all the elements to be used in the composition of big canvases. They show that even when he studied nature, pencil in hand, he was already thinking how he could paint it. His line is exceedingly attractive and never repeated. It is not studied, but is a series of quick strokes, which are approximations more or less exact. He draws on the blank paper, delicately and with precision, but his drawing shows less the outlines than a suggestion of the play of light. Faces and flesh in the light are scarcely touched. Draperies and clothing, on the contrary, are loaded with strokes which show immediately the strong opposition of shadow and light and the flickering reflections. These drawings are almost always raised by red and white chalk. They are rapid notes which have the movement and warmth of life.

NOTES ON THE ENGRAVINGS

Rubens neglects no means by which to bring his engravings before the public. Thanks to his influential relatives, he obtained privileges in Flanders, France and the United Provinces which protected him from imitators. It is more difficult to express in black and white the brilliant colouring of his painting than that of any other artist. He therefore supervised with the greatest care the execution of his engravings. He chose those of his pupils who seemed to him best qualified for this branch of art. For their guidance he gave them very finished drawings and afterwards he retouched their work. Some of the engravings are indeed probably by Rubens' own hand (the *O d Woman With the Candle*, *St. Catherine*). In spite of the minute, painful slowness of the burin, one is reminded of the dashing movement of the brush. The engravers, trained in the painter's studio, are marked by special characteristics, which have given them the title of "Engravers in Colour." There is, first of all, Peter Soutman, who represents wild hunting scenes with rather a coarse stroke; then Lucas Vosterman, with a more delicate and flexible touch (*Fight of the Amazons*, in six plates), and his pupil, Paul Pontius, whose engraving of *St. Roch* of Alost is famous; Boetius and Schelte van Bolswert who has reproduced the landscapes of Steen. Lastly, Rubens himself drew his compositions on wood, leaving to Christoffel Jegher the task of engraving them. The result is wonderful, due to the expressive beauty of the lines. Simple outlines, rich or meagre, some well-placed strokes, show us Rubens' genius, the intense vitality and grace of his faces, everything which can be expressed in black and white. (Cf. H. Hymans, *Engraving in the School of Rubens*, in 4°, Brussels, 1879.

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Although this correspondence seldom treats of painting, the letters are of great importance for an understanding of Rubens' mind and character. He had composed several short essays which remained in manuscript. In a letter to Peiresc (March 16, 1636), he wrote of having sent an *Essay on the Subject of Colour*, which has not been found among the latter's papers.

He had written a short study on *How to Copy Statues*. De Piles said that he had the Latin text before his eyes, and has given a French translation of it in his *Course on the Principles of Painting*. Paris, 1708, p. 139.

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